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THE TWO HARLEMS
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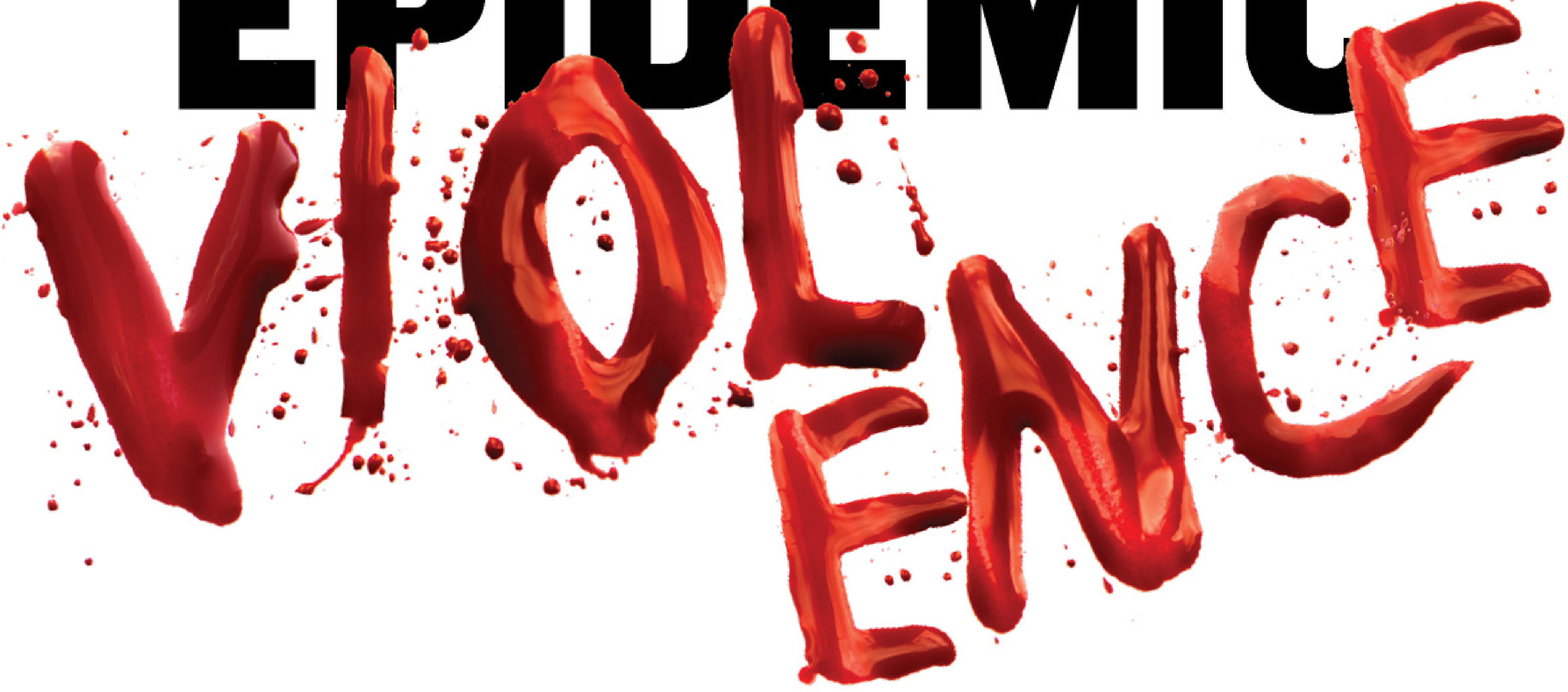
The Nation.

JUNE 1/8, 2020

THE *OTHER* EPIDEMIC



Public health insights are reshaping our understanding of how violence spreads.

JACK HERRERA

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Letters

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A STORY OF ASYLUM | LORRAINE HANSBERRY'S LEFT
THE Nation.
WHILE YOUR ATTENTION WAS ELSEWHERE
The Extinction Crisis Comes Home to San Francisco
Earth Day Live(s)
Organizing in the Courts Won't Save the Planet

What's the Matter With San Fran?

It was so sad to read "The Extinction Crisis Comes Home" by Jimmy Tobias [May 4/11]. I lived in San Francisco from 1967 to 1987. It was the most delightful city in the world. What made it so was the incredible diversity of ideas, ethnicities, lifestyles, income levels, and the arts. The Board of Supervisors was young, hip, and progressive. It was horrific to read that Mayor London Breed has actively opposed healing the bay. How does this happen to a city that has championed recycling, gender equality, LGBT rights, the environment, progressive politics, and many other groundbreaking ideas? I think it has to do with money, who has it now, and how to keep it.

Ginny Butler
SPOKANE, WASH.

Unspoken Rules

I really enjoyed reading Elias Rodriques's "The Good of All" [May 4/11], on Lorraine Hansberry's radical imagination. It prompted some very nostalgic memories of when my eighth-grade English teacher passionately taught us *A Raisin in the Sun*.

This piece and those memories made me realize the unspoken rules of teaching about black leaders from the period. We received a sanitized image of these revolutionaries. The unfiltered message of these fighters should be known, no matter how uncomfortable it makes anyone feel.

Peyton Harris
GREENVILLE, S.C.

The Source of Our Disagreements

Noam Chomsky's letter in the May 4/11 issue obfuscates the source of our disagreements. He discusses Israeli obstructionism, which, though real, has nothing to do with our dispute. The facts are simple:

For decades, he has peddled the bizarre theory that, beginning in 1976 (and continuing thereafter), the Arab world and the Palestine Liberation Organization suddenly accepted Israel's existence and sought a peaceful, two-state solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict. He has specifically included Iraq (then ruled by Saddam Hussein), Syria (Hafez al-Assad), and Libya (Moammar El-Gadhafi) in this noble axis of peace. More recently, Chomsky has added Iran and Hamas. Thus the sole obstacle to peace, he has repeatedly argued, is Israel—including its peace camp.

To support his claim, Chomsky cites an obscure, never-passed United Nations resolution from 1976. But his description of the resolution is incorrect: In calling for the refugees' return, it negated two states. More important, Chomsky has apparently never read the debate surrounding the resolution—which is key to discerning the actual political positions that underlie the rhetorical officialese of UN texts. In this debate, the Arab states and the PLO reject the UN's previous land-for-peace resolutions (the only possible basis for two states), mock the concept of territorial integrity and recognized borders, repeatedly and furiously denounce the "racist" "Zionist entity," and reaffirm their commitment to armed struggle. To interpret this as a call for peace is astonishing.

As proof of his claims, Chomsky cites his own books. I would suggest that interested readers go instead to the UN documents, available on the Web: the draft resolution (at unispal.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/0/696D540FD7821BCE0525651C00736250) and, especially, the resulting debate (at unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/0/D0242E9E210D937585256C6E0054DF8A).

There are many good books on the labyrinthine relationships between the PLO, the Arab states, and Israel; many are justifiably critical of Israel. Readers might consult Alain Gresh's

(continued on page 26)

The Nation.
since 1865

Democracy Dies in Dysfunction

Like many Americans, Joe Biden is skeptical about President Trump’s respect for democracy. “Mark my words: I think he is gonna try to kick back the election somehow, come up with some rationale why it can’t be held,” Biden said at an online fundraiser in late April. He’s right to worry but wrong about how Trump’s inclination toward voter suppression will manifest itself this fall. It would take an act of Congress—including the Democratic-controlled House—to upend the federal law that requires general elections be held on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November.

But that does not mean Trump won’t try to mess with the elections, in which, polls suggest, he and Republican Senate candidates are now vulnerable. This president thrives on chaos and fear, and the Covid-19 pandemic has created plenty of both. The virus that led 16 states to postpone primaries this spring could resurface in time to disrupt the November elections. In many states, that disruption could depress turnout—a prospect that seems to appeal to Trump, who recently complained that if voting was made easy, “You’d never have a Republican elected in this country again.” How far might Trump and his minions go? After Republicans blocked efforts to organize safe and fair Wisconsin elections on April 7, state Democratic Party chair Ben Wikler warned of a GOP that “remorselessly weaponizes courts, election laws, and the coronavirus itself to disenfranchise the voters who stand in its way.”

Democrats can act now to avert chaotic, low-turnout fall elections. Stacey Abrams, the 2018 Georgia gubernatorial candidate who now leads the voting rights group Fair Fight, says, “No. 1, we have to have vote-by-mail.” Building on existing vote-by-mail and absentee ballot rules, she says, “We simply have to scale it so that every state can execute it at the level necessary for a country in crisis, and that is doable.” Abrams proposes a “toolbox” approach, in which states make voting by mail available to all, along with safer early and in-person voting. But the time to scale it up is running out, and hard-pressed state and local governments don’t have the necessary resources. The National Vote at Home Institute calculates that 42 states would need “infrastructural changes” to make voting by mail a readily available option. “Can we expand the vote-by-mail system? Absolutely,” Amber McReynolds, the group’s CEO told BuzzFeed News in April. “But if this drags on for weeks and decisions are slow, it’s not possible.”

To get the $4 billion the Brennan Center says states need to pay for equipment, postal fees, and necessary changes to guarantee “safe and sanitary in-person voting,” urgent federal action is required. Trump’s resistance to funding the Postal Service and vote-by-mail initiatives can be overcome if congressional Democrats play hardball in stimulus negotiations. Democracy advocates must tell House Democrats that funding for safe and fair elections cannot be compromised away.

Advocacy also has to ramp up in the states. On May 8, California Governor Gavin Newsom signed an executive order that every registered voter in that state be mailed a ballot before the November elections. All other Democratic governors and sensible Republicans should be encouraged to do the same.

In states where Trump-aligned Republicans erect barriers to statewide action, there’s a local option. Prodded by the Working Families Party and voting-rights advocates, the Milwaukee Common Council voted unanimously in late April to create a SafeVote program that will send absentee ballot applications and postage-paid return envelopes to roughly 300,000 registered voters in the city. “The COVID-19 pandemic has shown us that nothing is truly certain at the moment,” council member Marina Dimitrijevic told the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, “but with SafeVote we can make certain that all registered voters in Milwaukee can easily apply for an absentee ballot for the historic and pivotal election this fall.” That certainty must be demanded for all voters in all states this November.

JOHN NICHOLS FOR *THE NATION*

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VOLUME 310, NUMBER 15, JUNE 1/8, 2020

The digital version of this issue is available to all subscribers May 19 at TheNation.com

BY THE NUMBERS

30%

Share of US businesses owned by people of color, accounting for 8.7 million jobs and $1.3 trillion in revenue annually

78%

Share of white-owned businesses shut out of the first round of loans from the Paycheck Protection Program

91%

Share of businesses owned by Latinos, Native Hawaiians, or Pacific Islanders shut out of the first round of the PPP

95%

Share of black-owned businesses shut out of the first round of the PPP

100%

Share of business owners with a felony conviction in the past five years barred from applying to the PPP

0

Number of standard demographic questions on the PPP loan application

—Taliah Mancini

COMMENT

Bridgegate to Nowhere

Another nail in the coffin of our public corruption laws.

Nobody will be held to account for the massively corrupt scheme of political retribution known as Bridgegate. Not former New Jersey governor Chris Christie, whose office ordered the closure of lanes leading to the George Washington Bridge in 2013 to punish the mayor of Fort Lee, Mark Sokolich, after he refused to endorse the governor for reelection. Not Christie's right-hand man, David Wildstein, who pleaded guilty to avoid serving time. And not Bridget Anne Kelly or Bill Baroni, the henchmen who orchestrated the lane closures.

That was the lesson of the unanimous Supreme Court ruling on May 7 overturning the convictions of Kelly and Baroni, who were the only people ever prosecuted for the scheme. Now everybody has gotten away with it, and Christie, whose proto-Trumpian pettiness set the stage for the entire corrupt disaster, still gets to keep his gig bloviating for ABC News.

In some respects, I'm glad Kelly and Baroni got out of their convictions. Oh, they're guilty as hell. Both admitted that their goal was to cause traffic problems in Fort Lee, ultimately stranding schoolchildren and preventing first responders from going about their lifesaving duties. But for those two to go to prison while Wildstein, who masterminded the plot, got off with probation was unfair. Prosecutors are supposed to flip people to go up the chain of command. In this case, the prosecutors were so afraid of Christie that they flipped Wildstein to go down and imprison functionaries like Kelly and Baroni. There would have been no Bridgegate without Christie's blessing or Wildstein's direction. Since the prosecutors were too yellow-bellied to try to prove that in court, the choice to pick on Christie's underlings was weak and cowardly.

> *The Supreme Court has made clear that our anti-corruption laws no longer function.*

Still, even though I believe the court reached a fair outcome, the way it got there puts another nail in the coffin of our public corruption laws. The court reasoned that Kelly and Baroni could not be convicted of fraud because there was no property or pecuniary interest at stake. Essentially, since neither received an envelope marked "Cash considerations for your corrupt endeavor," the Supreme Court threw up its hands and threw out the case. It said that Kelly and Baroni had the regulatory authority to close lanes on the bridge, and even though the court acknowledged that they used that authority for a corrupt purpose, it concluded that the only actions that constitute a crime under the relevant federal laws are the receipt or misuse of money (or property) in furtherance of corruption.

That argument should sound familiar. It's basically the same one Republicans made to defend Donald Trump when he was impeached for attempting to extort foreign help to influence the upcoming election. The president had the authority to withhold military aid from Ukraine, Republicans said. That he did so in exchange for a personal political favor was apparently irrelevant.

While the Republican-controlled Senate is responsible for turning a blind eye to Trump's corruption, conservative *and* liberal justices appear united in the belief that courts should no longer be in the business of holding government officials to account for violating the public trust. The Bridgegate case is just the most recent example. In 2016 the court threw out a conviction against former Virginia governor Bob McDonnell. He received money and gifts from wealthy donors in exchange for access, but the court determined that mere access to public officials was not an "official act" that could sustain a public corruption charge. That ruling was also unanimous. Apparently, government officials need to strut around the Capitol wearing a "Votes 4 gold" sandwich board before they can be prosecuted.

Between McDonnell and Bridgegate, the Supreme Court is making clear that it thinks our anti-corruption laws no longer function. Speaking for the unanimous court in Bridgegate, Justice Elena Kagan wrote, "Not every corrupt act by state or local officials is a federal crime." That statement is misleading. She should have written, "Not a single corrupt act can be construed as a federal crime anymore because nothing matters, LOL." It's almost impossible to imagine what kind of public corruption conviction this Supreme Court would let stand without massive changes to federal statutes.

While the nation's highest court is busy overturning convictions, the rest of the justice system is trying to make sure that convictions never happen in the first place. In 2018 the Department of Justice dropped its corruption case against New Jersey Senator Bob Menendez; like McDonnell, Menendez was accused of taking campaign money in exchange for access. Then, in 2019, the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that Congress had no standing to sue Trump over his ongoing violations of the emoluments clause in the Constitution. So that clause becomes another rule the courts have rendered useless.

It's an odd time for courts to be vitiating our public corruption laws. The first family has so many conflicts of interest that merely tracking them is a full-time job. Earlier this year, US senators got busy dumping stocks based on classified briefings about the novel coronavirus. And Attorney General William Barr is so slavishly beholden to Trump's personal legal defense that he is refusing to prosecute Michael Flynn, who already pleaded guilty to a crime.

Then again, perhaps we shouldn't be surprised by the Supreme Court. The court, under the allegedly institutionalist leadership of John Roberts, has refused to adopt any ethical guidelines governing the justices' behavior while in office. Why should they impose ethical strictures on anybody else?

This country is being looted. The courts are letting it happen. So is the Justice Department. And the president? He's leading the charge. In this fetid context, Kelly and Baroni absolutely deserve their freedom. The troll under the bridge has just as much a right to make a living in this putrefying kingdom as anybody else. ELIE MYSTAL

After Corbyn, After Covid

This is not Britain's finest hour.

Every Thursday at 8 PM, I open my front door, step out, and bang a saucepan. My neighbors, most of whom I have not seen since the previous Thursday, are there too. Clapping, clanging, banging garbage can lids. We come out to cheer the National Health Service.

The lockdowns have spawned many rituals across the globe to show public support for health workers during the coronavirus crisis. The clapping started in Wuhan. It took off in Italy. The Spaniards and French began doing it every night.

LONDON
LETTER

But the British ritual has a slightly different meaning. The NHS, created in 1948, is the only entirely nationalized health care system in Europe. It makes us more proud to be British than the royal family. It's virtually the only element of the postwar consensus that has survived Margaret Thatcher and Tony Blair, even if there's considerable dissatisfaction with the way it is run.

The Conservative prime minister, Boris Johnson, had the chutzpah to come out and clap; even Prince Charles and Camilla have joined in. They have no choice. It's like supporting the troops in America, but instead of applauding the foot soldiers of military might, we celebrate the frontline workers in publicly funded health care. Each Thursday evening, however hopelessly hopeful, deluded, and contested, our 8 o'clock ritual feels like a moment of social democratic hegemony.

During the general election campaign just a few months earlier, the Labour Party tried to make the underfunding of public services in general and the NHS in particular the central issue. That strategy failed horribly. Brexit predominated, and the Tories now enjoy their biggest majority since 1987.

Labour's left-wing leader, Jeremy Corbyn, had to go. The race to succeed him was a lackluster affair even before the coronavirus sucked the oxygen out of the news cycle. The three final candidates all promised to listen harder. That made sense: During the previous four years, Labour showed little appetite for taking voters or votes seriously. The nation had chosen to leave the European Union in a referendum. A significant section of the party insisted that people didn't know what they were doing and should vote again. After years of tortuous triangulation and entanglement, this became party policy.

The party membership had also voted overwhelmingly for Corbyn. Too few in the Labour establishment listened to that, either. From the moment it was clear he would win, the party establishment tried to delegitimize his leadership. This not only showed contempt for the membership—which twice delivered Corbyn resounding victories—but also undermined the party's election efforts. So more listening would have been a good idea. In the end, though, the race for a new leader did not turn on Brexit or Corbyn at all.

Whether or not to leave the European Union had become an intractable conundrum for a party with a coalition that spanned the metropolitan areas that voted Remain and the former centers of heavy industry that voted Leave.

Meanwhile, Labour's leadership was decided by a party that had grown both in membership numbers and in assertion under Corbyn, even as its ranks had been diminished in Parliament. Support for the man was always less cultish than detractors claimed; support for the leftward orientation his victory signified was always far less ideological than devotees would have liked.

Corbynism was never a coherent ideology. But it did leave a legacy: a broad political trajectory toward more fiscal redistribution, party democracy, greater investment in public services—not least the NHS—and an end to austerity. And that trajectory remains popular. In the end, the leadership election didn't turn on anything at all. It just kept on going, even as everything else around us flipped upside down, with the candidate who started out as the favorite winning comfortably.

On April 4, Keir Starmer was elected the Labour Party's leader, easily defeating two women: Rebecca Long-Bailey, who was assumed to be Corbyn's favored successor, and Lisa Nandy, who wasn't. As the shadow Brexit secretary, Starmer had been the face of Labour's call for a second Brexit referendum, a policy that proved deeply unpopular with Leave voters in the Midlands and northern England, where the party hemorrhaged seats.

After Labour's loss in December 2019, it was argued that the party was too London-centered and out of touch with its northern base. Yet Starmer represented the London constituency adjacent to Corbyn's, while both of his competitors were based in northern England. Moreover, Labour remains the only national party not to have had a female leader. Given that women were running from every wing of the party, this seemed like a golden opportunity.

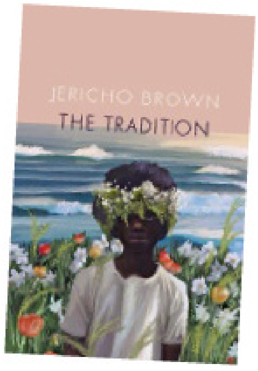
Starmer's credentials hew to the center, even as his loyalties and ambition, in this moment, keep him loosely tethered to the left. All three contenders had at one time been in Corbyn's shadow cabi-

ILLUSTRATION: CINDY LEE

PULITZER SEASON

Nation Laurels

Nation editorial board member and frequent contributor Greg Grandin won a Pulitzer Prize in general nonfiction on May 4 for *The End of the Myth: From the Frontier to the Border Wall in the Mind of America*. The book was also a finalist in the history category. *The Nation* published an excerpt, titled "The Blowback of Empire's Defeat," in our March 11/18, 2019, issue.

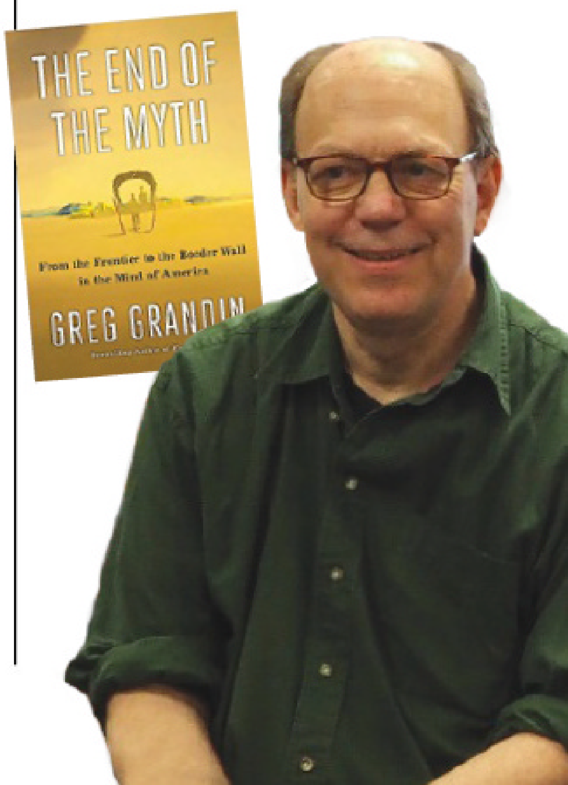


The Pulitzer board called *The End of the Myth* "a sweeping and beautifully written book that probes the American myth of boundless expansion and provides a compelling context for thinking about the current political moment."

He was also nominated for a Pulitzer in history in 2010 for his book *Fordlandia: The Rise and Fall of Henry Ford's Forgotten Jungle City*. Grandin has been contributing to *The Nation* since 1999.

And in our January 14/21, 2019, issue, we published "The Microscopes," from Jericho Brown's *The Tradition*, which won the Pulitzer Prize for poetry.

Finally, frequent Comix Nation contributor Matt Bors (see page 8) was a finalist in editorial cartooning for his work at *The Nib*.


THE END OF THE MYTH
From the Frontier to the Border Wall in the Mind of America
GREG GRANDIN

WHITE HOUSE

Lowering the Barr

As Election Day nears, William Barr's Justice Department has abandoned all pretense of impartiality or legality. In dropping the charges against Donald Trump's first national security adviser, Michael Flynn, who pleaded guilty not once but twice, the attorney general has caved to the president's dictatorial whim.

Barr's action was so shocking that, for a moment, it knocked the coronavirus from the headlines. Former president Barack Obama even suggested that the rule of law was threatened as a result of Barr's move—an extraordinary statement, given how careful Obama has been to stay out of the daily fray over the past three years. Meanwhile, Trump reacted with a series of tirades against the crooked G-men and evil political figures who had wrongly ensnared Flynn and would soon be getting their comeuppance.

In tweeting about the May 12 special congressional election in Southern California (triggered by the resignation of Democratic Representative Katie Hill), Trump continued to test-run two new campaign themes: that the Democrats will try to steal the election through rigged vote-by-mail systems and that by opening additional polling stations in poorer neighborhoods, they are making it somehow unfairly easy for minorities to vote.

Instead of focusing on our spiraling public health and economic calamities, the president has decided to spend his time coordinating disinformation campaigns. —Sasha Abramsky

THE TRUMP SHOW
ACT 9

CINDY LEE

net. Long-Bailey had been loyal throughout, while Starmer and Nandy were both part of a coordinated series of resignations in 2016—the "chicken coup"—that failed to depose Corbyn. Unlike Nandy, Starmer rejoined the fold and gained prominence as Brexit unfolded and unraveled.

Starmer has resolved not to "oversteer" away from Corbyn's policies of taxing high-income earners and increasing public spending and nationalization, and he has eschewed gratuitous criticism of Corbyn in favor of party unity.

Under ordinary circumstances, given the hole Labour is now in, Starmer would be expected to lead the party back to viability rather than government. But these are no ordinary circumstances.

British politics is exceptionally volatile. Party allegiances are weak, and while the Tory victory was broad, it was shallow. Between 2010 and 2017, almost half the voters switched parties. They might switch again. With just a 5 percent swing, 56 seats could go to Labour—or 55 could go to the Tories, consigning Labour to the same fate as other European social democratic parties, from France to Greece, which are now effectively defunct.

The National Health Service makes us more proud to be British than the royal family.

Two days after Starmer became Labour's leader, Johnson was hospitalized with Covid-19, his illness dominating the news. Starmer made his debut to a national shrug. The general election felt like a long time ago, even though the questions that shaped it have not gone away. Brexit remains impervious to any simple solutions.

And party unity cannot just be proclaimed from on high. Under Corbyn, Labour's failure to address widespread accusations of anti-Semitism has led to an investigation by the Equality and Human Rights Commission, a government body. It has yet to report its findings.

Meanwhile, a recently leaked internal Labour report revealed that party bureaucrats hostile to Corbyn had for years purposely frustrated efforts to expel anti-Semites, knowing it would reflect badly on his leadership. The report also reveals party workers targeting minority MPs for ridicule—and expressing deep dismay when Labour gained seats and vote share under Corbyn in 2017. Some, not least those activists who canvassed hard for a Labour victory in the dead of winter, wait eagerly to see if Starmer's warm words about unity are matched by efforts to discipline those who have undermined it.

But most of the country has moved on. For now, the coronavirus is the only opposition. Logistically, the government has botched its response to the pandemic horribly, leaving Britain with the highest death toll in Europe, even as it plans to ease the lockdown despite warnings that this could unleash a second wave. For seven days, the prime minister lay frail in London's St. Thomas' Hospital—the enfeebled embodiment of his government's policy toward the virus. A month earlier, he boasted of going to see Covid patients and shaking their hands. He'd also suggested the government had discussed letting the country "take it on the chin…and allow the disease…to move through the population."

Before his hospitalization, Johnson missed important meetings on the growing crisis. His ministers ignored warnings; austerity imperiled preparations; the promised tests and protective gear came too little and too late. At his daily briefing in March, the NHS England medical director said, "If we can keep deaths below 20,000 we will have done very well in this epidemic."

At press time, we are approaching 35,000 deaths, and public confidence in the government's handling of the virus has plummeted. Not long after Johnson emerged from the hospital, his fiancée gave birth to their child. For now, public support for Johnson remains fairly stable. But there are only so many births he can celebrate, and meanwhile the deaths keep coming.

Johnson's public standing is due, in no small part, to recognition that the government's economic response to the pandemic has so far been impressive. At the end of March it resolved to pay 80 percent of the wages of furloughed workers, up to £2,500 per month, to prevent them from being laid off by their employers.

Around the same time, the government ordered all local authorities in England to find accommodations for the homeless during the pandemic. With the help of over £3.2 billion in funding, most have been moved into hotels. To rescue the rail companies from imminent collapse, the entire network has effectively been brought back under government control. Meanwhile, disadvantaged children will be supplied with a free tablet or laptop and 4G mobile or broadband service so they won't fall behind with their education while homeschooling. But Johnson is standing on fragile ground. In a televised address to the nation this month, his confused messaging—encouraging construction and manufacturing workers and others to avoid using public transport while returning to workplaces that might still be unsafe—invited public derision and conflict with the unions.

Let us not dwell, for the moment, on the fact that when Labour promised to nationalize the railways, offer free broadband, and tackle homelessness, the Tories said it couldn't be done and the commentariat mocked Corbyn's fiscal illiteracy. The money has been found during what promises to be an extended economic recession.

Where does that leave a center-left opposition now? As social democratic parties across Europe

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are either eclipsed by those further left or struggling to transform themselves, the question "What is Labour for in this moment?" is very much alive.

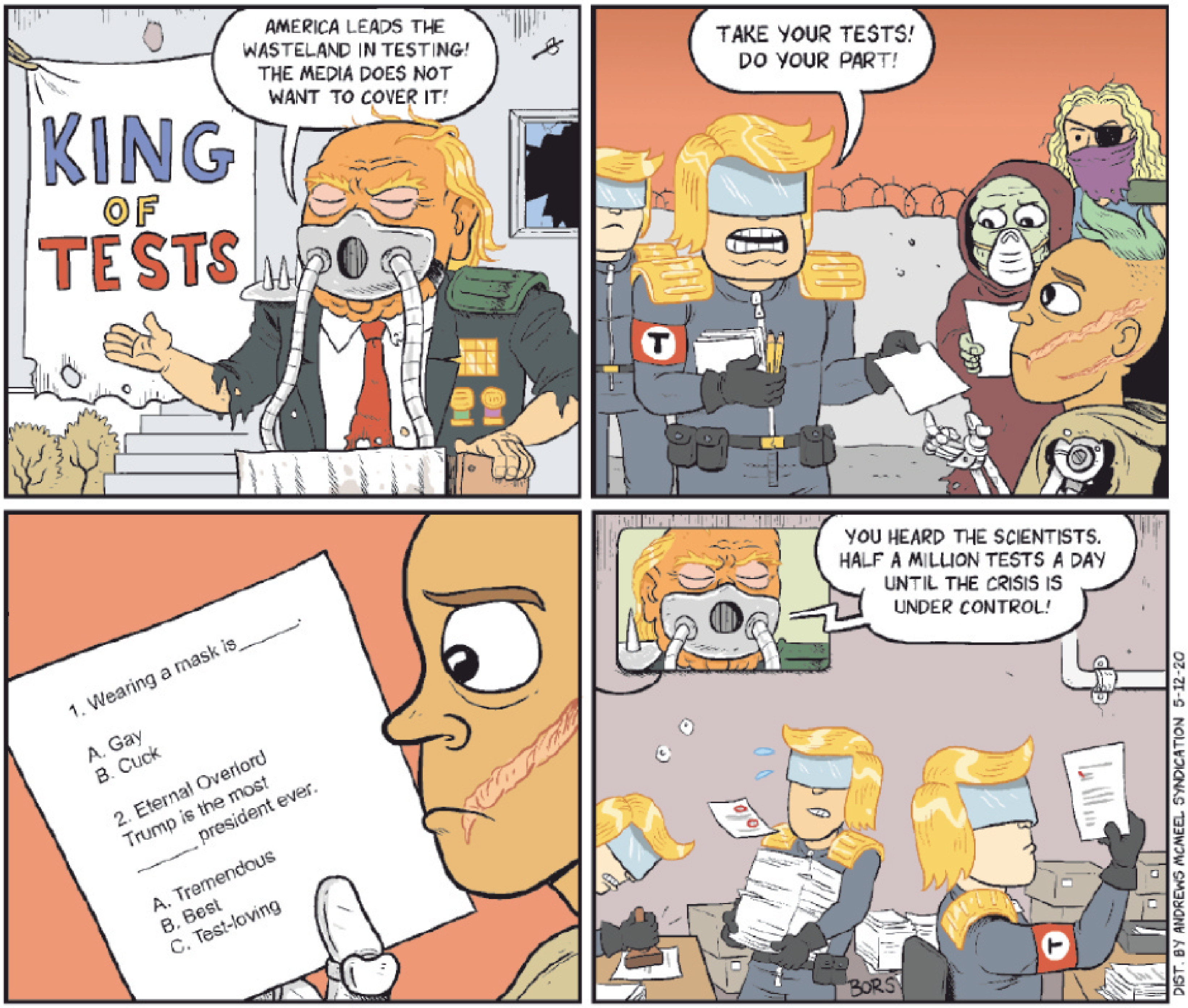
Starmer has assembled an eclectic team, including Long-Bailey, Nandy, and former leader (and *Nation* intern) Ed Miliband. Considerably to the right of what had come before, it is nonetheless sufficiently progressive to satisfy enough of the faithful.

Starmer also moved quickly to apologize to Britain's Jewish community over the issue of anti-Semitism. His appearances at the dispatch box have been solid. He will enjoy a quiet honeymoon because he's not Corbyn and few are paying much attention.

But the job Starmer interviewed for—unthreatening center-left leader of Her Majesty's Opposition, here to steady the ship and quell the mutiny—no longer exists. A democratic socialist agenda is now a far more plausible response to this crisis and the depression that will follow than a neoliberal one. Covid has laid bare the inequalities and inequities that have grown under Tory rule and made an unanswerable case for massive state intervention and fiscal redistribution. There will be no clamor for the homeless to be put back out on the streets or for recently connected poor kids to be shoved off the grid.

The Tories enjoyed an electoral victory in December but not an ideological one. Shortly after announcing the lockdown, Johnson declared, "There really is such a thing as society." It marked as clear a break with Thatcher's rhetoric (she once said there wasn't) as his rescue package was with her economics. The shape that our politics will take after this crisis is up for grabs. The questions of which workers are key to the economy and which are not, of who and what we value and why, of what we can afford and what we should not tolerate, are no longer merely left talking points but burning questions that Labour is well positioned to address.

There is unlikely to be an election for another five years. But there will definitely be clapping and a banging of pots next Thursday. GARY YOUNGE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KING OF TESTS
TAKE YOUR TESTS! DO YOUR PART!
T
1. Wearing a mask is ______.
A. Gay
B. Cuck
2. Eternal Overlord Trump is the most ______ president ever.
A. Tremendous
B. Best
C. Test-loving
YOU HEARD THE SCIENTISTS. HALF A MILLION TESTS A DAY UNTIL THE CRISIS IS UNDER CONTROL!
T
BORS
DIST. BY ANDREWS MCMEEL SYNDICATION 5-12-20

COMIX NATION

Drawing Interest

Matt Bors, a regular contributor to Comix Nation, was a 2020 finalist for a Pulitzer Prize in editorial cartooning.

In a recent review of Bors's new book, *We Should Improve Society Somewhat*, Jeet Heer writes, "Many of Bors's strongest strips are set in this dystopia, called the Wasteland, where the problems are even more severe than our reality—but political attitudes remain the same." Heer concludes that Bors's ability to give life to the attitudes of Trumpism and "make them visible and highlight how ridiculous they are, makes him the ideal portraitist of the Trump era."

Eric Alterman

Enemies of the People

Trump’s latest press secretary is a perfect fit for his White House.

With an employment history distinguished by hypocrisy, dishonesty, racism, xenophobia, homophobia, and shamelessness, Donald Trump’s new press secretary, Kayleigh McEnany, might be the president’s most perfect appointment yet.

The press is treating her lack of training in journalism or government as unique, but McEnany is, in fact, following in the footsteps of Heather Nauert, who burst onto the media scene 20 years ago with no qualifications, save for a burning desire to be famous and an ability to persuade an older white male network executive—Fox News’ Roger Ailes—to put her on television to pontificate about politics. Now these are exactly the kind of “qualifications” that land a person in a top-level government job. (Nauert, Trump’s former State Department spokesperson, would probably be the nation’s UN ambassador today had she not withdrawn her name from consideration as a “personal decision.”)

McEnany rose to prominence as a result of her Twitter feed. Back in 2012, at age 24, she tweeted hilarious “jokes” like the one promoting an imaginary TV series—“How I Met Your Brother”—followed by the punch line “Never mind, forgot he’s still in that hut in Kenya” and the hashtag “#ObamaTVShows.” Weirdly, this did not get her hired at Fox, but it didn’t hurt her chances at CNN, where she originally presented herself as an anti-Trump Republican. At the time, she complained that Trump’s statements were “racist” and dismissed his campaign as “not serious” and “a sideshow.” But CNN president Jeff Zucker needed pro-Trump pundits, and so McEnany—just a law student at the time—was somehow recast in that role, along with the hapless Jeffrey Lord. Apparently Zucker didn’t care whether what McEnany said was true or even made sense. Like some other male cable TV directors, he may have thought right-wing blondes were just fun to watch. As to the question of why he would hire people for the 2016 election with a willingness to defend Trump’s lies and zero journalism experience, Zucker told *The New York Times* in 2017, “Everybody says, ‘Oh, I can’t believe you have Jeffrey Lord or Kayleigh McEnany,’ But you know what? They know who Jeffrey Lord and Kayleigh McEnany are.”

The Liberal
Media

McEnany has now replaced Stephanie Grisham, who followed Sarah Sanders and Sean Spicer as White House press secretary but managed to avoid *Saturday Night Live*’s mockery by failing to hold a single press briefing during her nine months in the job. If there were any doubts about McEnany’s suitability for the position, she likely put them to rest on February 25, when as the Trump campaign’s national press secretary, she announced on Fox Business, “We will not see diseases like the coronavirus come here, we will not see terrorism come here, and isn’t that refreshing when contrasting it with the awful presidency of President Obama?”

In proud Trumpian tradition, McEnany began her tenure with the statement “I will never lie to you. You have my word on that” and then proceeded, immediately, to lie. The lies were about Trump, of course, but also about Brett Kavanaugh, Joe Biden, Robert Mueller, Michael Flynn, and the FBI, among others. Here, for instance, is McEnany’s reading of an FBI memo referring to Flynn: “Quote, ‘We need to get Flynn to lie,’ quote, and ‘get him fired.’”

Here is what the memo actually said: “What’s our goal? Truth/Admission or to get him to lie, so we can prosecute him or get him fired?”

Remember, McEnany is a public official whose salary is provided by taxpayers and whose job is to inform the press—that is, to tell the truth about what the executive branch is doing. And yet the woman whom the *New York Daily News* called an “often soft-spoken Bible-loving conservative rising star” and whose “energetic spinning of the administration’s struggle against the coronavirus,” according to *The New York Times*, has earned “grudging respect for her sheer doggedness” could not do her job for 15 minutes without undermining its essential reason for being. And here’s the worst part: It (mostly) worked. The regular morning update from *Axios*’s Mike Allen repeated her dishonest “I will never lie to you” pledge without any explanation or context. So did the next day’s *Times*, with a headline that read, “‘I Will Never Lie to You,’ McEnany Says in First White House Briefing.” (Though to be fair, the story itself was pretty accurate.) The clearest headline that appeared in a major news outlet was above Aaron Rupar’s article for *Vox*: “Minutes after pledging to not lie, the new White House press secretary lied a whole bunch.”

OK, so the president’s press secretary is hardly the most important person in any administration, but this one is exemplary of the Trump White House. Everywhere you look, Trump has appointed people who view the purpose of their job as to destroy the department they were chosen to lead. We have an attorney general dedicated to undermining the rule of law and a secretary of state who destabilizes our alliances and trashes our treaties. Plus Trump’s recent appointee as director of national intelligence is someone who juiced his résumé and gives every impression of being a conspiracy theorist. The only reason he might be confirmed is that Trump appointed an even nuttier and possibly even more destructive person as the acting director. Every time one of these appointments occurs, the press pretends that the person is on the level.

McEnany began her tenure with the statement “I will never lie to you” and then proceeded, immediately, to lie.

People talk about battling the coronavirus as if we were at war. And we are. But we’re at war with our own government, with Trump treating the executive branch as his personal army, bent on the destruction of our constitutional democracy. And though the president is clear about his intent when he calls honest journalists the “enemy of the people,” so far, too many members of the media cannot stop themselves from collaborating. ■

TOP RIGHT: ANDY FRIEDMAN

JOURNALISM

Saving the News

There is no freedom of the press without the press. And the press is threatened as never before. Exacerbated by the pandemic, the crisis in local media requires immediate attention. Congress must support journalism in future stimulus measures.

Free Press Action has a comprehensive plan that, if adopted by Congress, could go a long way toward saving local journalism. Its proposed recovery package would do the following:

§ Provide approximately $1.5 billion in emergency stabilization grants to local news organizations at $50,000 per newsroom position. This would cover 30,000 newsroom jobs.

§ Direct this money toward workers: The funds must be devoted to maintaining payrolls and benefits. Any news company is eligible, but recipients would be barred from using funds for dividend payments, executive compensation, debt service, or purchasing securities.

§ Distribute these funds via the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, expanding its mission and giving it the necessary authority.

§ Establish accountability and transparency measures to track how the money is spent and to build firewalls that would prevent the government from interfering in content production or impeding First Amendment activities.

These are concrete steps that recognize an important truth. As Nora Benavidez, PEN America's director of US free expression, explains, "Local news is not a luxury, it is a public good."

—John Nichols

Recorder
Recorder
$1.00

JEREMY HOGAN / SOPA IMAGES / LIGHTROCKET VIA GETTY IMAGES

Kali Holloway

White Freedom, Black Death

The noxious ideal of white American freedom is behind Ahmaud Arbery's murder.

By now, there is no need to recount the details here. It is a fair enough summation to write that three months ago, Ahmaud Arbery, a black 25-year-old, was hunted and summarily executed by white gunmen while jogging near Brunswick, Georgia. Despite his killer having literal blood on his hands when officers arrived at the scene, the state ruled that Arbery's murder was not worth inconveniencing his assailants' lives with either arrest or prosecution. In the instant they grabbed guns, put together a posse, and pursued him, Arbery's white killers demonstrated their confidence that white American indifference to black death grants them power, impunity, and above all, liberty.

Which is to say, white American freedom. That ideal has always been a sinister thing, rooted in the notion that whiteness is endowed with the inalienable right to control black bodies and determine black destinies. As a policy tradition—historically spelled out in the actual letter of American law and still visible in how the laws are unequally applied—it is one of this country's foundational beliefs. White American freedom relies on the use of terror and violence (and very often, gun violence) when it perceives even the mere reality of black existence as a threat to white authority and comfort.

Both Arbery's killers and Georgia state authorities exercised white freedom at every turn. His murderers saw themselves as free white men and, as such, duly entitled to police the movements, motivations, and ultimately, the right to exist of a black stranger. District Attorney George E. Barnhill, whose son previously worked with one of the killers, wrote a letter of recusal that amounted to an indictment—of Arbery. In it, Barnhill wrote that he and senior trial lawyers "do not see grounds" to arrest the murderers, effectively attributing Arbery's killing to his having entered "their neighborhood" and then ignoring the shouts from armed white men "telling him to stop."

Alan Tucker, the Georgia lawyer and acquaintance of the gunmen who leaked footage of the killing, once again putting black death into viral, heavy rotation, essentially blamed Arbery for his own murder, stating "if he had just frozen"—meaning halted and deferred to white freedom's right to question him—"he wouldn't have got shot." That sentiment is echoed by the tens of thousands who signed on to the GoFundMe accounts or joined Facebook groups dedicated to supporting Arbery's killers. Like every episode of black death that garners even the mildest critiques of those who carried out the murders, Arbery's killing has attracted a wide and vocal audience who make their advocacy for the tenets of white freedom known.

White freedom's inextricable link to black subjugation is woven into the fibers of American history, from all-white colonial militia patrols to keep black enslaved people in line to the unknowable thousands of post-Reconstruction lynchings that served to blare the consequences of black freedom mistaking itself for true American citizenship. The Red Summer of 1919—a bloody period of white mob terror and what historian Bill Tuttle identifies as black "ethnic cleansing" across 25 American cities—was the response when black civil rights efforts threatened white Americans' mythologies about their own innate racial superiority. The white terrorism of Jim Crow, like mass incarceration and extrajudicial police violence, is a continuous thread that affirms the steadfast endurance of white freedom. The mode of lynching black folks may change with the technology of the times, but the product is always the same old black death.

White freedom is on full display by the overwhelmingly white protesters of stay-at-home orders around the country, in demonstrations that proliferated after reports of Covid-19's black death tolls racialized the disease. It is not incidental that those defenders of white freedom have likened orders to remain at home to stem the spread of a deadly virus to the brutality of slavery while insisting that the ranks of disproportionately black and brown service workers already dying of the disease get back to making their lives comfortable.

> *Arbery's murderers saw themselves as free white men, duly entitled to police a black stranger's right to exist.*

Nor is it insignificant that they have openly carried firearms as they stormed statehouses—an open threat to anyone who would suggest that the rule of law might apply to them. (The fact that protesters yelling insults into the faces of police and carrying weapons hasn't left a single white protester dead proves that the white freedom they're fighting for has been with them all along.) If they were black and protesting the killings of black folks, these scenes would be described as riots. Instead, Donald Trump's economic adviser Stephen Moore equated those white protesters with black civil rights workers, calling them "the modern-day Rosa Parks," a gesture meant to inflame but also to signal that the fight for white freedom is patriotic. Trump, whose presidency and administration have been one long exercise in white freedom, tweeted they should "LIBERATE MINNESOTA," "LIBERATE MICHIGAN," and "LIBERATE VIRGINIA." Meanwhile, black folks are being arrested and even shot for not social distancing.

On May 3, a black North Carolina woman and her son were besieged in their home by a mob of 15 angry white men, one reportedly carrying an assault weapon and another holding a shotgun. In the group was a sheriff's deputy who, when told he had the wrong house, blocked the doorway with his foot and demanded to enter, according to the family's lawyer. Law enforcement officers who initially responded to the scene made little effort to investigate the incident, which didn't end in violence but certainly could have. The officers didn't cite white freedom as their excuse for doing nothing in response to an armed vigilante group terrorizing a black family.

They didn't have to. ■

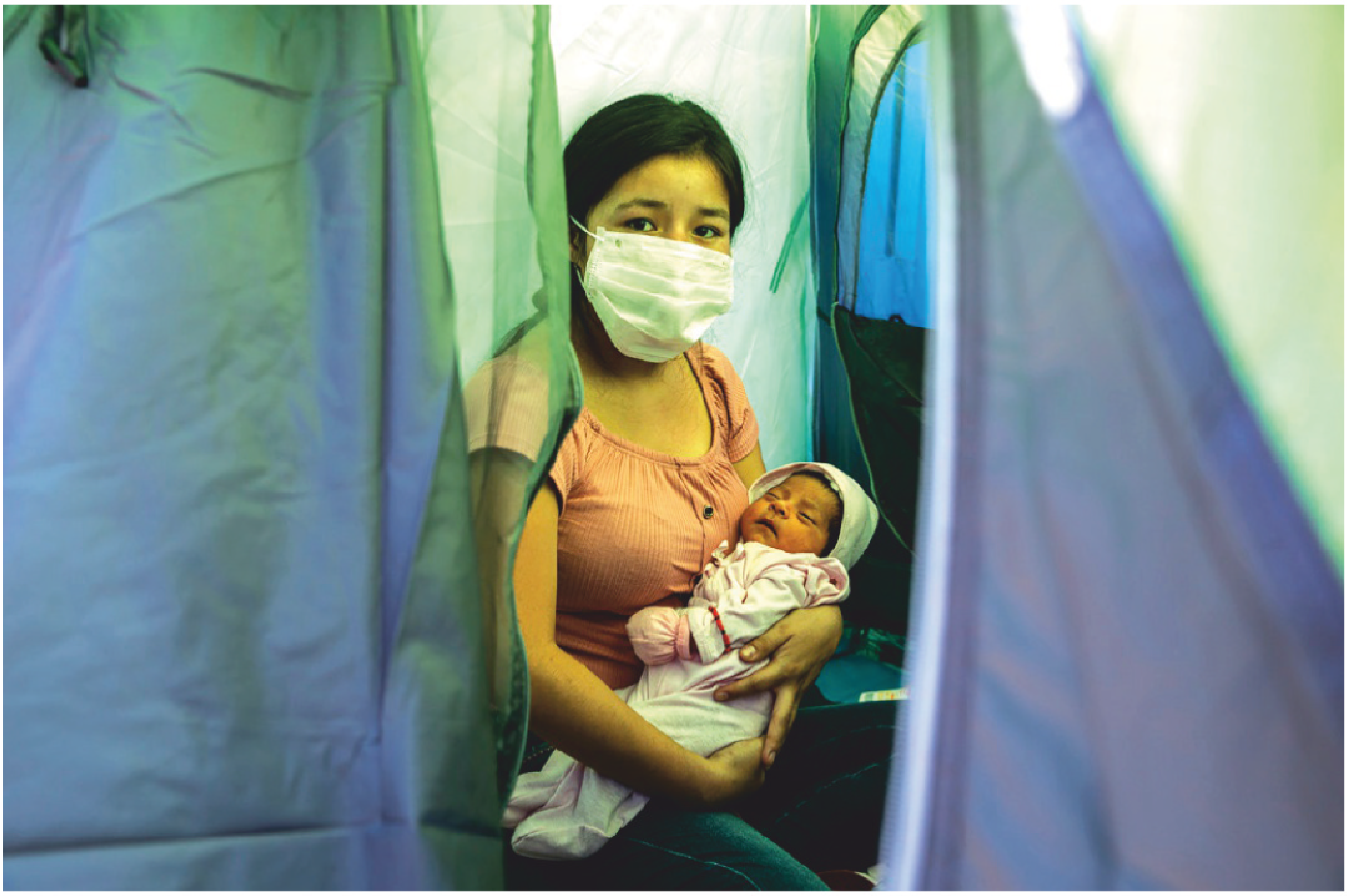
Kali Holloway is the director of the Make It Right Project and a journalist whose writing has appeared in The Guardian, The Daily Beast, Time, HuffPost, *and numerous other outlets.*

It is not incidental that protesters of state coronavirus lockdowns have likened stay-at-home orders to the brutality of slavery.

SNAPSHOT / **MUSUK NOLTE**

Peruvian Exodus

In Lima, Peru, thousands of people lost their jobs to the Covid-19 pandemic and can no longer afford to live there. Now they're camped outside bus terminals, waiting to return to their hometowns. Maria Isabel Llamanjo is seen here with her 20-day-old daughter. In late April, she finally secured a seat on a bus.



MAGNUM FOUNDATION

Calvin Trillin
Deadline Poet

BARR DROPS THE CASE AGAINST FLYNN

A pass for Flynn, Barr thought, might be quite nice,
Despite the fact that Flynn pled guilty twice.
To Barr, the law's whatever serves his boss.
For that, he sees no line he wouldn't cross.
So could it be that boss has learned to clone?
In Barr he's found, at last, his own Roy Cohn.

Public health insights are reshaping our understanding of how violence spreads.

JACK HERRERA

THE *OTHER* EPIDEMIC

VIOLENCE

The dividing line: Tijuana is a dangerous city, San Diego a relatively safe one—but the border wall isn't the reason for this drastic disparity.

Tijuana, Mexico

A FEW BLOCKS FROM THE US BORDER, on a street corner in front of a large warehouse carved out and converted into a car wash, the locals say you can buy guns, watches, sex, meth—whatever. Conflicts and scuffles aren't uncommon here, and in a bit of irony not lost on anyone, the cops are never far away. The municipal police keep a substation on the opposite corner, a constant line of nearly a dozen patrol cars across the street from the car wash and the open-air drug deals.

To set the scene in Tijuana, I could describe the manicured gardens outside the handsome midcentury city hall. I could take us to the Pacific Ocean, where artists and activists have turned the border wall, that scar of barbed wire and steel across the beach, into a series of beautiful murals. I could picture the engineers working in the city's booming aerospace industry or the thriving restaurant scene, with the sweet tamales served after dinner, the craft breweries.

Increasing militarization: The US pours billions of dollars into border security each year.

This corner, though, is where I learned Mexico has changed. One afternoon last October, I was interviewing a worker at the car wash when someone shouted to turn the room's attention to the TV on the wall. We peered up at a news broadcast of scenes that looked as if they had come from a disaster movie. Masked men rode through the city in the back of a pickup truck, an enormous gun mounted on the tailgate. Then another masked man lying on his belly fired a high-caliber rifle into a group of scattering police officers.

The people in Tijuana **are not the true source of the violence** in that city.

"What is this?" I asked.

"It's live. From Sinaloa," someone answered, not looking away from the screen. "Culiacán. The narcos have gone to war."

From that street corner in Tijuana, it was hard to understand what later became clear. After the Mexican military captured Ovidio Guzmán López—*el hijo de El Chapo*, the son of the infamous drug lord Joaquín "Chapo" Guzmán—the Sinaloa cartel sought his release by taking a hostage: the entire city of Culiacán. In a battle that lasted throughout the day, the cartel outorganized and outfought the military and police block by block. In the end, the government caved to the cartel. Guzmán was released in order to restore peace in the city. The narcos won.

On the corner, it was time to leave. The sun was setting as I traveled about five minutes to the main crossing between Tijuana and San Diego. On the Mexican side, Guardia Nacional members had been mobilized around the pedestrian crossing. I walked between two of these heavily armed troops to cross the bridge into the States. I passed rows upon rows of walls, fences, razor wire, and guarded gates. I showed my passport to an agent from Customs and Border Protection, who scrutinized my face as dozens of cameras recorded me. And then I was back in the US.

In recent years, resisting fear as a political impulse has meant resisting the argument that the United States needs this kind of security on the border—the surveillance, the barriers, the agents with guns. President Donald Trump's dream, the wall, has been rightfully lambasted on the left as a useless monument to racist tribalism. Many see that the barrier's intent is symbolic as much as tactical. The border, after all, is an imaginary line across the continent. A wall, however, could give it reality—a stone and steel way to separate supposedly good, honest Americans from the people on the other side, the people Trump calls "bad hombres."

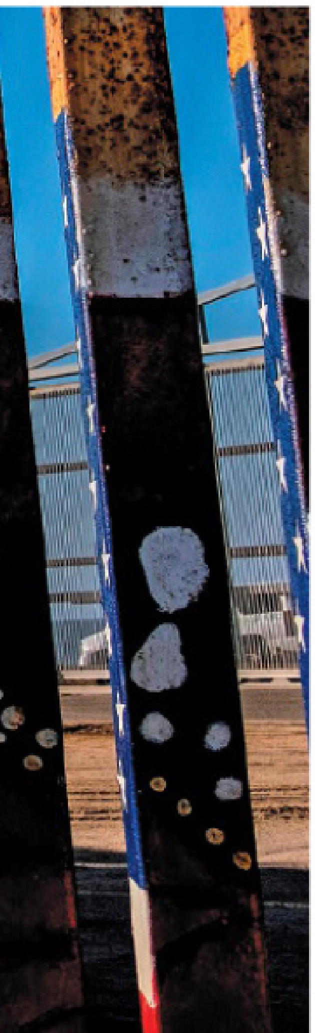
On days like October 17, when a cartel took an entire city hostage, it was hard not to feel a sense of relief as I crossed back into the US. I felt safer on the American side. What happened in Culiacán felt possible in Tijuana in a way it didn't in San Diego.

The world changes in the space between San Diego and Tijuana. In recent years, the latter has become one of the homicide capitals of the world. In a city of 1.8 million people, more than 2,500 were killed in 2018 alone. Overwhelmed by bodies, the city's morgue has overflowed. Neighbors protested the stench of decay, which regularly reaches their homes.

Just across the border, San Diego remains one of the safest big cities in the US. In 2018, with a population of 1.4 million people, it had just 86 killings—more than 95 percent lower than the homicide rate in Tijuana.

That massive difference in violence repeats along the entire border. Northern Mexico is now one of the deadliest places in the hemisphere. For US citizens, the State Department issued a Level 4 ("Do not travel") advisory for Tamaulipas, a border state on the Gulf Coast south of Texas—the same level as for Syria, Yemen, and North Korea. At the same time, border cities across the southwestern US aren't just safer than their Mexican counterparts; they're also some of the safest places in the country.

Jack Herrera is an independent reporter covering immigration, refugee issues, and human rights. His work has appeared in Politico Magazine, Columbia Journalism Review, Pacific Standard, *and elsewhere.*



LEFT: GUILLERMO ARIAS / AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES; RIGHT: MARCO UGARTE / AP

Laredo and Brownsville, two towns just across the border from Tamaulipas, are both listed among the safest cities in the United States.

As the rates of violence increase rapidly in Mexico's border towns, some have been surprised that there's essentially no spillover violence in US cities. Could this be the effect of a militarized border? In between San Diego and Tijuana, a 14-mile steel barrier carves through the landscape. At times such as the day of the Culiacán battle and when I've heard gunshots while out reporting, it can feel as if those miles of concertina wire and armed patrols are justified—that as Trump and his allies argue, we need a strong barrier to stop the violence that plagues Mexico from migrating into this country.

That's not the truth. There's a simple fact that the wall obscures: The people in Tijuana are not the true source of the violence in that city. And keeping certain people out is not actually what keeps San Diego safe.

WHEN I DROVE TO TIJUANA, I CROSSED A border where the crime rate changed staggeringly, well before I even made it to Mexico. In Los Angeles, I headed toward the coast down Highway 110. In just 20 minutes, I went from Manchester Square (between Compton and Lawndale) to Rolling Hills Estates, a Malibu-like neighborhood in the hills northwest of Long Beach. In those few miles, the per capita violent crime rate plummeted 98 percent—from about 85 incidents per 10,000 people to just 1.2 incidents.

There are no border walls between Rolling Hills and Manchester Square, no checkpoints, no patrols keeping people out. Yet the violence stays incredibly localized; you can measure relative security by zip code. There are similar borders all over the country, in Chicago and New York, St. Louis and Miami, Houston and New Orleans.

How does this happen? For researchers studying violence, trying to understand why a city like Tijuana has become violent can look similar to trying to understand why the people of Flint, Michigan, began feeling sick in 2014. It's not really a question of who the people are. It's a question of where they live.

> **"The No. 1 predictor of whether a person will...commit violence... is if that person has been exposed to violence in the past."**
> —Charlie Ransford

From news reports in the United States, the growing violence in Mexico can seem a straightforward, bloody battle between the narcos and government agents (who are also sometimes narcos). However, for people such as Iván Cruz, who has lived most of his life in Tijuana, the growing danger doesn't feel like a war zone's. It's something different.

Cruz lives in Camino Verde, a southern Tijuana neighborhood that's notoriously dangerous. In the past few years, he's watched violence spread through his city like an epidemic. (As recently as 2014, Tijuana had fewer than 500 homicides per year. Last year nearly 2,200 were killed, a more than threefold increase.) While Americans focus on narco shootouts with high-powered weapons, Cruz hasn't seen the cartels swoop in and claim territory. Rather, it's the people of his neighborhood who seem to have changed. A toxic fog of danger and distrust now hangs in the air. People are killing each other. Neighbors are dying, and often no one knows who killed them. In this atmosphere of intense fear, people who were once peaceful feel forced to defend themselves; they pick up guns or join gangs. This is no war. There are no clear sides or enemies, no bad guys and good guys. Instead, it feels like the arrival of a plague, some disease that can spread through a neighborhood and take lives.

"It can touch you wherever you are," Cruz said. "You can try to stay out of bad areas, you can stay at home with the doors locked…but the violence can touch you anywhere."

SAN YSIDRO PORT OF ENTRY

False security: The heavily guarded San Ysidro vehicle border crossing that links Tijuana and San Diego.

MARCO UGARTE / AP

The first step toward understanding the epidemic of homicide in Tijuana is realizing that the word "epidemic" isn't a metaphor. About 40 years ago, researchers at the Centers for Disease Control in the United States began a series of odd experiments. By that time, modern epidemiology had essentially eradicated diseases like tuberculosis and influenza, which previously were significant sources of death and misery for Americans. Seeking to rededicate resources in December 1980, a group of CDC epidemiologists turned their attention to homicide, another common cause of untimely death. The scientists ran an experiment that was in many ways a shot in the dark. They began tracking instances of unsolved child disappearances and murders in Georgia. As they gathered more data, they saw the outlines of what later scientific work would make clear: Violence seemed to spread like a contagious disease.

"The No. 1 predictor of whether a person will go on to commit violence, more than anything else, is if that person has been exposed to violence in the past," said Charlie Ransford, the director of science and policy for Cure Violence, a US-based organization that uses epidemiological models to stop the spread of violence.

Right now, Mexico is experiencing its highest homicide rate in modern history. More than 120,000 people have been killed since 2016 (more than all US deaths in World War I). Recently, Americans' attention to the violence spiked after nine people—members of the Mormon-affiliated Lebáron and Langford families—were massacred in northern Mexico last November. But during much of that year, almost 100 people were killed in Mexico every day.

In my conversations with Cruz and others in Tijuana, the country's most murderous city, it soon became clear that it's not just a problem of narcos or soldiers. People talk about the violence as if it were a living force, something that's come to the city and affected people, something that can touch you and go into your house.

Thinking of violence as a disease, then, makes a lot of sense. An epidemiological

PRECAUCION
SEDENA

GUILLERMO ARIAS / AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

A wave of violence: Mexican soldiers guard a site where a man was killed by gunfire in Tijuana.

model of violence can explain why the homicide rate in Mexico has grown exponentially. Violence isn't caused only by "bad guys" who can be arrested and locked up. It's caused by cycles of risk and exposure, like any disease. People who were once healthy and peaceful can become sick with violence.

"It makes absolutely no sense if you think about it rationally—that a person experiences the harm of violence and then goes on and does it to other people," Ransford said. "But when you understand it as a contagion, something that is being passed on from exposure, then it starts to make sense."

Like many researchers studying violence, Ransford is now using a public health approach to flatten the curve. The same way that doctors educate the public about contagion risks or distribute condoms to help prevent the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, organizations like Cure Violence use targeted interventions for people affected by violence (for instance, someone who saw a friend shot), including connecting them to social workers, mediators, and therapists. The model has been astonishingly successful. In Cure Violence's first year working in one of Chicago's deadliest neighborhoods, the number of shootings went down by more than 67 percent. That success has been repeated in 20 cities across the United States, as well as in El Salvador, Honduras, Syria, Iraq, and other countries. (During the Covid-19 pandemic, Cure Violence has retrained its staff to encourage public health practices that discourage the spread of both the virus and violence.)

When I asked Ransford why violence seems to spread so much more easily through a city like Tijuana than San Diego, he replied, "Think of how a disease spreads. The biggest factor is the contagion itself, but there are other cofactors of transmission." He used cholera as an example, which typically needs a water source to spread. In San Diego, if someone caught cholera abroad and brought it home, it wouldn't cause an epidemic. San Diego has a working sewage system and clean tap water. But in areas without sewage systems or where the same river is used for drinking water and waste disposal, a single person with cholera can infect an entire city. This describes the difference between the two cities: There are established institutions that work in San Diego but don't in Tijuana, and there are vectors of transmission in Tijuana that don't exist in San Diego. So even when the contagion crosses the border—and the existence of tunnels and smuggling routes is an open secret in both cities—it doesn't have the same danger of spreading in California as it does in Mexico.

> **"Think of how a disease spreads. The biggest factor is the contagion itself, but there are other cofactors of transmission."**
> —Charlie Ransford

Asked whether the border wall could be keeping the violence in Tijuana from crossing into the United States, Ransford conceded that it might have an effect. But the more important variables, he said, are the environmental differences that make one city a hotbed for violence and the other a safe zone.

"What are the vectors of transmission in a place like Tijuana?" he asked. To put it another way, what is the violence equivalent of a contaminated river?

IVÁN CRUZ'S NEIGHBORHOOD IN TIJUANA, CAMINO Verde, is appropriately named. In its center, a canyon road curls along a creek bed, through the pale green of the Baja California brushland. In the late afternoon, the valley cools as the sun sinks behind the coastal mountains; the shadows of the scraggly trees lengthen along the steep hillsides, where houses made

ALUMBRA
PUBLIC
POLLOS Asados "ARCIGA"
Rostizados 2 Pollos Grandes asados x

Camino Verde: Rapidly and haphazardly urbanized, the neighborhood is one of Tijuana's most dangerous.

JACK HERRERA (3)

of fiberboard and tin roofs are stacked one on top of another. Like many neighborhoods on Tijuana's outskirts, Camino Verde was rapidly and haphazardly urbanized. The roads are winding and poorly maintained, and the electricity and sewage systems are improvised. Stray dogs, the real kings of the roads, stop traffic, and feral chickens wander between houses.

While Camino Verde has a reputation as one of Tijuana's poorest and most dangerous neighborhoods, its true notoriety comes from a small number of its residents. According to locals, it's known as the birthplace of some of Mexico's most famous killers. Taking advantage of the desperate conditions and lack of opportunity in the neighborhood, the cartels have long gone there to recruit their most brutal *sicarios*.

Up on one of the hills of Camino Verde, along a perilously steep walkway, Cruz lives with his parents, his sister, her son, his widowed sister-in-law, and her young son in a tidy house. When I first visited him, one of the neighborhood's stray dogs barked at me playfully as a man watched us closely from a car parked across the street. (*Halcones*, or gang lookouts, are a fixture in the neighborhood.)

Cruz was dressed in a neat blue polo shirt and carried a small backpack. At 30 years old, he has a round, boyish face and a fastidiously maintained haircut. He told me how he studied communications at a local university and graduated to work in a human resources department at one of the city's many factories. ("Finances and management," he said proudly.)

"When my family moved here in '97, Tijuana wasn't known for violence. But it's increased so much since then, to the point that now one is afraid to go out into the street. You don't know if someone will stop you, assault you, take your money." Cruz said that his family tried to adapt to the growing insecurity. "At first, you just think, 'OK, I'm going to be more careful.' You tell yourself, 'I'll stay safe. I'll teach my kids what's good and what's bad.' But then something happens to your family."

"We don't know anything about what happened. We have no idea—nothing. But if there wasn't earthly justice, we hope there will be divine justice."

—Iván Cruz

When Cruz invited me into his home, I noticed a small shrine above the crib where his nephew sleeps. On a makeshift cardboard shelf, paper flowers lay next to a printed photo of a young man, Cruz's brother, Alejandro. In November 2017, Alejandro (a pseudonym) became one of the thousands killed in the new wave of violence. Neighbors found his body not far from Cruz's house, at the bottom of the hill on the road that runs along the green creek bed. He had been shot twice.

In great detail Cruz told the story of learning that his brother had died but said there's still so much he didn't understand. He knew his brother, depressed and struggling under the insecurity of life in Camino Verde, sometimes used drugs; he also knew the corner where they found his body is near a now derelict liquor store where the rumor was you could buy more than just alcohol. However, even today, Cruz doesn't know exactly what happened to his brother. The police, if they ever truly investigated, have given up, despite the family's constant pleading for more information.

"We don't know anything about what happened. We have no idea—nothing," Cruz said. "But if there wasn't earthly justice, we hope there will be divine justice. We are believers."

The continuing mystery of Alejandro's death illuminates the specific nature of the violence in Tijuana and the rest of Mexico. The vast majority of homicides in Tijuana—more than 90 percent—go unsolved. And the killings that do get prosecuted are rarely the ones that take place in areas like Camino Verde. There's a reliable sense among residents that the crimes that actually get investigated are the ones that happen in wealthier neighborhoods, where the police and other municipal resources are concentrated. In contrast, in places like Camino Verde, there is an understanding, terrifying and bleak, that a person can kill someone else without consequence.

In Tijuana, there is an understanding that you can kill without consequence in a way that's not possible in a place like San Diego.

This, perhaps more than any other factor, is the equivalent of that contaminated river: impunity. In Tijuana, you can kill without consequence in a way that's not possible in a place like San Diego. Tijuana's broken criminal justice system is similar to a broken sewer system. It foments the contagion of violence and helps it spread rapidly through the population.

Impunity has been a documented cofactor of violence in cities like Chicago and Los Angeles, where police often fail to properly investigate gang-related killings; in Chicago, police solve only one out of every 20 shootings. Impunity can also explain much of the violence in the rest of Mexico. According to a 2017 study from the Mexican-based Center for Studies on Impunity and Justice, the country had the fourth-highest rate of impunity worldwide. As recently as 2016, it was estimated that fewer than 1 percent of crimes in Mexico were punished. The impunity tends to be worse in the states most affected by drug-related corruption: the border states of Baja California and Tamaulipas, as well as agricultural areas such as Guerrero and Oaxaca.

"Tijuana, with California just across the border, is one of the most important trafficking points," said Tijuana Mayor Arturo González Cruz (no relation to Iván Cruz). "This has created a very serious problem for us." After decades of narcos carving out a transit channel through Tijuana, the city's justice system has been seriously compromised. Many residents consider the police corrupt and unreliable, and they're often proved right. This means that Cruz's story is by no means rare. Hundreds of families live with a suddenly empty bed in their house and a deep sense of the unknown.

After Alejandro's killing, Cruz walked the streets wondering if any of the people around him had killed his brother and why. Without anything like the rule of law, his family members lived in fear and had to learn to navigate a complicated web of self-defense. They worried that Alejandro might have been targeted and that they too might be marked. They began avoiding certain streets, going home before nightfall, and doing everything they could to keep a low profile. They didn't want to make trouble. Then a year later, as they planned a memorial for Alejandro's death, tragedy befell the family again. Cruz's cousin was shot and killed.

"At that point, we fell into a state of total panic," he told me. "We all gathered in the house and locked every door. They had us terrified. We were scared to even go to the corner shop to get tortillas."

In this atmosphere of terror, the cartels find Camino Verde ripe for recruits. Without the police to protect them, residents have to defend themselves as best they can. It is to people living in this state of fear—in true, constant danger—that the narcos make their offer: We will put a gun in your hand. We will make you a killer, invincible. You can stop being afraid.

CRUZ HAD REMARKABLE PATIENCE WHEN WE talked about the origins of the violence that claimed his brother. When I asked why he thought the homicide rate was so different between Tijuana and San Diego, he appealed to sociology rather than demonize any of the people in his neighborhood. "The economic pressure—the need to eat—is stronger in Tijuana than San Diego," he said.

Along with the language and the homicide rate, there's another major characteristic that changes when one crosses the border from San Diego into Tijuana: the poverty rate. In Tijuana a high percentage of the city's residents are college educated, and the unemployment rate is low. But in a city sharply stratified between wealth and precarity, violence has defined borders, even without any walls. While the deeply marginalized outskirts of the city suffer from shocking rates of crime, much of Tijuana remains perfectly safe. The city is still a popular tourist destination,

(continued on page 25)

Remembering the dead: In Iván Cruz's Camino Verde home, he keeps a small shrine for his brother, who was shot and killed in 2017.

The Murder That Threatened

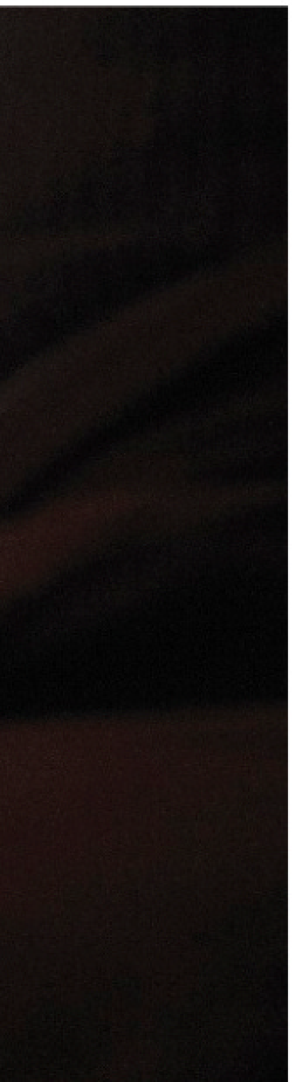
After a Barnard student was stabbed to death in Morningside Park, longtime residents and gentrifiers feared they'd find themselves at odds.

JOAN WALSH

Public mourning: Barnard and Columbia students and Harlem residents attended a vigil in Morningside Park days after Majors's death.

A horrific crime: Tessa Majors, an 18-year-old first-year Barnard student, was killed in Morningside Park last December.

to Divide the Two Harlems



TOP LEFT: GOOGLE MAPS; BOTTOM: DAVID DEE DELGADO / GETTY IMAGES

One day after Donald Trump floated down a gilded escalator to announce his presidential candidacy, a young white supremacist murdered nine black people who'd welcomed him into their weekly Wednesday night church study group in Charleston, S.C. The next day I moved to Harlem, blocks away from Morningside Park and Central Park, and I've never felt such a sense of belonging. It took me a while to make those connections, but they've found me over time.

One of the first things I did after moving here was track down a local meditation group and show up to its regular Wednesday drop and sit. My first night there, I watched as community people filed in, a mix of races, and loved it immediately. But soon I found myself, eyes closed, thinking about that welcoming Charleston church group just a few Wednesdays earlier. As practice got underway and a few people came in late, quietly taking their seats, I realized that nobody had locked the door. Was I afraid? And of what? I chastised myself for my unease. On that night, a white person in Harlem was safer than black people were in their own church in Charleston. And on every visit after, for the past five years.

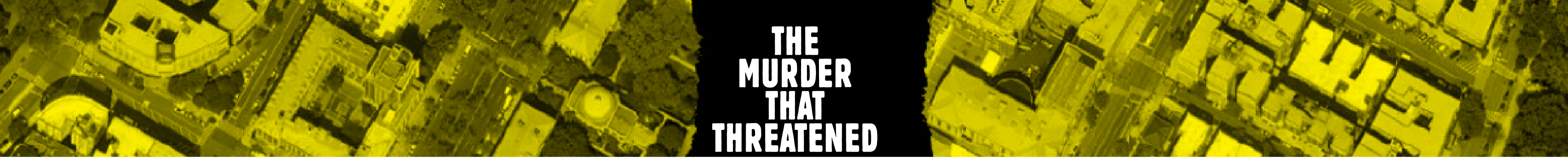
Of course, none of us are ever fully safe anywhere. A horrible example arrived virtually at my doorstep last December, a crime that drew national attention: A Barnard College first-term student, 18-year-old Tessa Majors, was killed walking through Morningside Park just after dark. Unlike in Charleston, it was not a racial crime, though Majors was white and three local African Americans, one 13 years old and two 14, were soon identified as suspects, allegedly in an attempted robbery that turned deadly.

The killing, a few short blocks away from my home, threatened Harlem's growing sense of itself as a neighborhood that is warm, thriving, and safe. I know: As a gentrifier who has barely lived here five years, I probably shouldn't speak for Harlem, long a citadel of black politics and culture. But living here, I saw the crime's impact, which landed differently on newcomers, mostly white, than on longtime residents, mostly black and brown. It threatened community activists' efforts to get police as well as newcomers to see black and brown youths as youths, not criminals. And it challenged newcomers to admit their unconscious fears about their new home—as I have had to do with mine over these last tough months.

The pace of demographic change in Harlem has been dizzying. Two decades ago, my local friends say, you almost never saw a white resident. But between 2000 and 2018, the neighborhood went from 2 percent white to 14 percent while the black population dropped from 77 percent to 56 percent. Crime rates fell dramatically as well. Morningside Park and much of the Morningside Heights neighborhood lie in the New York Police Department's 26th Precinct, which averaged more than a dozen murders and two dozen rapes annually in 1990; those numbers were down by 87 and 65 percent, respectively, in 2019, and burglaries had dropped more than 90 percent. To the "more dangerous" east, in the 28th Precinct (where I live), the numbers are somewhat higher, but the declines are roughly the same. Rape, murder, and burglary have declined 84, 88, and 90 percent, respectively, since 1990.

Neighborhood change can also be measured by the number of new fun and fancy restaurants and bars; my stretch of Frederick Douglass Boulevard came to be known as Harlem's Restaurant Row in the early aughts. Now there's Melba's and Harlem Food Bar, Lido and Vinateria, Zoma and Harlem Tavern, and many more. I first came up here to eat and drink, not live, but I wound up staying for the multiracial sense of community.

Yet not all of my community can enjoy these changes.



There are now two Harlems: one restaurant- and bar-hopping, racially integrated but notably white, the other struggling economically and mainly black and Latino. In Central Harlem South, white households have a median annual income of $103,000, three times that of black and Latino households, according to a 2018 report by the Citizens Committee for Children. Harlem-wide, the black unemployment rate was 9.24 percent in 2018, versus 4.62 percent for whites.

The killing of Majors threatened to divide the two Harlems. It triggered communitywide post-traumatic stress disorder, as police swarmed the park and the surrounding area and local and national media stigmatized the neighborhood once again. Six weeks later, though, most sides of the neighborhood came together at a forum organized by Friends of Morningside Park, a nonprofit that raises money and recruits volunteers to improve the park, and Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer, along with other politicians and community groups. Everybody was fighting not to make this another sad old story, always written by outsiders, about the impossibility of living, thriving, safely in Harlem. “The proof is what happens after,” Aissatou Bey-Grecia, the vice president of Friends of Morningside Park, said at the forum. “It’s not the end of today. It’s what happens next month, what happens over the summer.”

The next month, of course, the whole city was headed into lockdown, as it may well be through the summer. Many of the police who swarmed the park after the killing remain, but almost all of the families and teenagers who frequented it are gone. The hospitals that offered resources to the park community and its young people are now in their own crisis. The three juvenile suspects are locked up in Crossroads Detention Center in the Brownsville neighborhood of Brooklyn, their trial dates uncertain. Meetings to follow up on the promises made to the community by local officials were canceled. “I worry about losing momentum now,” Brad Taylor, the president of Friends of Morningside Park, told me just as the pandemic crisis began. Within a few days, we both worried more about losing neighbors.

“The police presence felt like a way for the police and the university to say, ‘OK, we’re really paying attention now.’ But it was overdone.”

—Jane Spinak, Columbia professor and Morningside Heights resident

MAJORS WAS KILLED ON DECEMBER 11, DURING final exams. Third-year Barnard classics student Aditi Rao remembers getting the first notification about a nearby crime just after 7 PM that Wednesday. “We get a lot of public safety announcements. A lot are like ‘A bike was stolen on 125th Street.’” This one was more ominous, reporting something like “a Columbia student was involved in a robbery,” she recalls.

“Around 9 we got word that a first-year student had been fatally involved in a robbery. Everybody panicked, contacting all the first-years they knew, and the first-years all panicked, being asked if they were alive,” Rao says somberly. “Getting Tess’s name was just the final confirmation that something irreparably bad had happened.”

Rao knew Majors from a distance; both were part of the university’s music scene. The blue-green-haired (formerly blond) Majors, a young feminist iconoclast, had her own band, Patient 0, which released its first album, *Girl Problems*, last September, and Rao deejayed at the university radio station. “She seemed a very sweet and kind person. Like a lot of first-years, she expressed a lot of joy and happiness just being on campus.”

Majors and Rao had something else in common: Neither was afraid to traverse Morningside Park, a narrow greenway that stretches from 110th to 123rd Streets, to get between their campus and Harlem to the east. In fact, Rao says, she crossed the park just 24 hours before Majors was killed, returning from Double Dutch Espresso, a local coffee shop. (Full disclosure: Rao is a friend of my daughter’s.) Rao says she made that walk across the park from my neighborhood regularly, but her friends didn’t always go along.

“They’d say, ‘Oh, can’t we just walk along 110th Street?’” she says with a chuckle over the phone. (The rectangular detour adds at least 15 minutes to the hike.) “White students in particular talked a lot about how unsafe the park was,” adds Rao, who is South Asian.

Almost immediately, some students “racialized” the crime, she recalls. On December 12 she tweeted, “You can critique the school for not making you feel safe and protected w out the anti-Harlem rhetoric…. we’ve all been told that Morningside Park is ‘unsafe’ and every time it’s said, even now, it’s coming from a place of anti-blackness.”

Rao got some student blowback for her tweet, but that’s certainly how some in the Harlem community perceived it. “The way the Police Department was talking about all these kids as thugs, using language that criminalized them, was wrong,” longtime local youth advocate Iesha Sekou, the CEO of Street Corner Resources, tells me. She says parents reported that they saw “police were swiping, swabbing the mouths of these young boys” in the neighborhood to collect DNA. Everybody

Dragnet: Police patrol the park where Majors was killed.

DAVID DEE DELGADO / GETTY IMAGES

Community roots: Vito Jones, above left, a Friends of Morningside Park board member, and Brad Taylor, the group's president.

COURTESY OF FRIENDS OF MORNINGSIDE PARK

agrees, though, that some police presence was overdue. Friends of Morningside Park and other local activists had long been asking for more policing—specifically, Taylor says, three full-time park patrols, especially officers on foot, and improved lighting. But the response to the killing wasn't just more patrols; it was an occupation, with police cars and vans at virtually every entrance to the park and tall clusters of floodlights that kept neighbors from sleeping.

"It was just a dramatic overreaction," says Jane Spinak, a Columbia University law professor who specializes in juvenile justice and is active in Friends of Morningside Park. Having lived in the neighborhood for 31 years, Spinak thought Columbia, Barnard, and the local precinct were overcompensating for not having paid enough attention to park security in the months before Majors was killed. After a string of robberies and an attack on a long-time LGBTQ activist there last spring, the leaders of the 26th Precinct were slow to respond to requests for increased patrols from Taylor and others. "The police presence felt like a way for the police and the university to both say, 'OK, we're really paying attention now,'" Spinak says. "But it was overdone and went on way too long."

On the night of the killing, Majors was captured by private surveillance video, walking alone on West 116th Street and into the park, just as Rao did the night before. "It's tough to watch. She looks so happy, and you know within minutes she'll be dead," a source involved in the case tells me. Then a bodega camera filmed her too. The young suspects were caught on video after entering the park farther north. Majors crossed Morningside Park from east to west and climbed its steep, iconic, multilanding stairway to Columbia. On one landing, prosecutors allege, the suspects attacked her. They tried to rob her, but she resisted, screaming for help. After she bit the finger of one of the 14-year-olds, he allegedly drove a knife into her chest—four times, so hard that her purple coat puffed out its white down, like final breaths. Police reports say the wounded Majors climbed the final landing before she collapsed. She then dragged herself to a Columbia security station, where a guard found her. She died soon after.

Officers picked up the 13-year-old suspect the day after the killing, in the vestibule of a residential building half a block from the park. When police spotted him, he was still wearing the same khaki pants and red sneakers as the night before. They interviewed him with his legal guardian, his uncle, but without a lawyer. Detective Wilfredo Acevedo insinuated, falsely but legally, that park cameras had recorded everything that happened, so he ought to confess. That misdirection infuriates Sekou. "No, it's not on camera!" she tells me angrily. Acevedo later testified that "pixelated" video captured the crime—while admitting it didn't show the 13-year-old participating in the physical altercation—but the source involved in the case disputes that the actual stabbing is on video.

"You can critique [Barnard] for not making you feel safe and protected w out the anti-Harlem rhetoric."

—Aditi Rao, Barnard student, in a tweet

At the 26th Precinct, the teen's beleaguered guardian proved an imperfect advocate. Video of the interrogation shows him berating his baby-faced nephew while the cops are out of the room. "A family member is no substitute for a lawyer," an exasperated Spinak tells me. She once led the juvenile rights division of the Legal Aid Society, which now represents the teen. "People are often afraid for their child and think that if they cooperate with the police, they'll go easier on them." Acevedo implied as much to the scared 13-year-old. "Some family members of the boys kind of made an assumption…an assumption of guilt, it seems," Sekou says sadly.

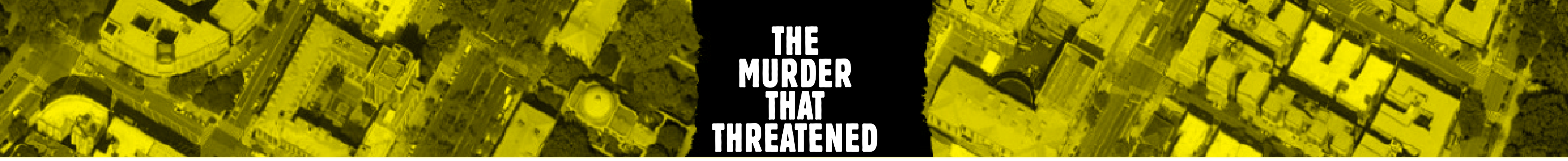
In the end, the teen cooperated with police, but it appears nobody went easier on him in response. He was immediately sent to a juvenile detention center in Brownsville, far from his Harlem home. His uncle broke down in tears, promising he'd visit when he could. "As soon as they call me, I'll be here." He hugged the child and walked away.

Soon police named the 14-year-old suspected of committing the stabbing; his name and photo were spread on social media and in the press and on posters in my neighborhood. Almost two months later, police arrested him and the friend accused of holding Majors during the stabbing. Investigators claimed there was DNA evidence matching one of the 14-year-olds found under Majors's nails after she died. The *New York Post* published the names and photos of all three teens; even *The New York Times* identified the 14-year-olds. District Attorney Cyrus Vance announced he would try the two 14-year-olds on murder charges as adults, while the 13-year-old will be tried as a juvenile in family court on second-degree felony murder.

As a longtime neighborhood homeowner told *New York* magazine, the huge police presence seemed designed to quiet the fears of newcomers—more explicitly, white people—around Harlem and Morningside Heights. "What are you going to do to protect us from the natives?" he says, channeling the newcomers' complaints to the cops. "The undertone is jungle drums."

THAT *NEW YORK* FEATURE, WHILE IN MANY WAYS excellent, nonetheless irked locals by describing Morningside Park as a neglected "no-man's-land [belonging] to the City of New York, but in reality no one cares for it." In reality, many people do care for it, most notably the members of Friends of Morningside Park. I've watched it grow. Brad Taylor is described in the piece as a "gentrifier," though he has lived in the area for almost 30 years and has been active in Friends for 20 of them.

That's not to say Morningside Park doesn't need more resources. But heartbroken neighborhood leaders who fought for the park's renaissance didn't understand why a single crime, however heinous, undid the hard work of



the last 20 years. “This terrible thing happened, yes, but I don’t feel any less safe in the park now than I did six months ago,” Spinak tells me. “We’ve worked really hard to create a community here,” Bey-Grecia says.

Morningside Park and Central Park are jewels of New York’s vast public park system. Both were designed by Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux, the pair also behind majestic Riverside Park, which runs four miles along the Hudson River. Morningside now boasts a pond and waterfall, ballfields, basketball courts, playgrounds, gorgeous statues, a Saturday farmers market, and a large dog run. The pond is home to ducks, geese, and turtles, as well as egrets, herons, and cormorants. You get stunning views of Harlem below from a wooded hiking trail where I’ve done mindful walks with my local meditation group.

Despite their architectural heritage, Central Park and Morningside Park became symbols of an era’s crime and neglect when New York declined from the 1960s through the ’80s. Mayor John Lindsay put Morningside first on a list of the country’s most dangerous parks. Even urban preservationist Jane Jacobs called it “a dreadful neighborhood liability.” Central Park became a hub of crime back then, too, of course. The most obvious and terrifying parallel to the Majors killing is the case of the Central Park Five, when in 1989, barely a mile away, a young white female jogger was beaten and raped and five black and Latino teens were arrested and imprisoned—wrongly—and, five to 12 years later, released. Trump, then a high-profile real estate developer, called for them to get the death penalty. That case has shadowed the killing of Majors. “Everything they said [about the Majors suspects] was what they said about the Central Park Five,” Sekou tells me.

Which doesn’t mean the charged teens did not commit the crime; it does mean that dehumanizing, racist language still comes easily to the police and to some in the neighborhood when black youths are suspected of harming a young white woman.

Reading about my neighborhood’s history, I discovered a killing much closer to Morningside, now almost forgotten, that just like this one led to hand-wringing about how Harlem was raising its young people. In June of 1985 on Morningside Drive, not far from where Majors collapsed after she was stabbed, two young black brothers allegedly tried to rob an undercover police officer, who wound up shooting one of them, 17-year-old Edmund Perry; he died at the same hospital Majors did almost 35 years later. And just like the teens accused of killing Majors, the brothers came from the still-demonized streets east of the park.

“The way the Police Department was talking about all these kids as thugs, using language that criminalized them, was wrong.”
—Iesha Sekou, Street Corner Resources

A sixth-generation Harlemite who lived on troubled West 114th Street just blocks from Morningside Park, Perry stood out at equally troubled Wadleigh Middle School, half a block from his family home. A model program of the time sent him to Phillips Exeter Academy in New Hampshire. The summer he was shot, he was headed to Stanford University.

New York magazine did a long story on the 1985 Morningside Park crime, too. Meticulously reported, it nonetheless brimmed with the white suspicions of the age. In the end, the writer blamed Perry’s death on “race”; significantly, he didn’t use the word “racism.” The piece concluded with a Reagan-era argument that “the billions that New York City spent to correct its inequities led to the fiscal crisis,” which had made the city even more dangerous, leading to Perry’s alleged crime and also his killing. Describing Harlem as a “hellhole,” the complicated article ultimately wound up as a simplistic parable: You can take the kid out of Harlem, but you can’t take Harlem out of the kid.

OF COURSE, AS A WHITE GENTRIFIER, SOMETIMES I wonder, Am I taking the Harlem out of Harlem?

Perry grew up about a minute from where I live now. From my living room, I can see the steeple above Wadleigh Middle School, where red-tailed hawks regularly alight. I walk along West 114th Street whenever I take my dog to the groomer—maybe that’s gentrifier behavior, but it’s a black-owned business. I vote at Wadleigh.

When I told filmmaker Stanley Nelson where I live, he laughed and reminded me that I would not have walked my dog along West 114th in the 1970s and ’80s (left unspoken: I would not have lived here), when it was an open-air drug bazaar. When Perry was growing up here.

Long before that, of course, Harlem was the pride of black America. From the 1920s through the ’50s, it was arguably unrivaled in terms of the artistic, cultural, economic, and political talent of its almost uniformly black residents. Four towering figures in black political history—Marcus Garvey, Malcolm X, A. Philip Randolph, and Adam Clayton Powell—built a following here, along with artists like Zora Neale Hurston, Lorraine Hansberry, and James Baldwin.

But riots in 1935, 1943, and most

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WE STOP FORECLOSURE

Prices soar: Gentrification has caused property values in Harlem to skyrocket, putting pressure on longtime residents. Between 2000 and 2018, the black population fell from 77 to 56 percent.

CHRIS HONDROS / GETTY IMAGES

In memoriam: A makeshift memorial for Majors at the site of the vigil.

DAVID DEE DELGADO / GETTY IMAGES

devastating, in 1964 (all triggered by actual or suspected police misconduct) were signs that Harlem was no black paradise. From the Great Depression through the 1950s, racism, rising unemployment, poor schools, neglectful absentee landlords, and a growing drug trade came to make Harlem synonymous, especially to outsiders, with crime and despair.

After talking to Nelson, I became obsessed with the history of my neighborhood—Perry's neighborhood. It turns out that a plan to fully renovate all the units on his block was one of the first salvos in Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty, just months after the 1964 riots. Announced by Office of Economic Opportunity director Sargent Shriver in February of 1965, the project promised to make West 114th Street "a Harlem showplace." And the efforts of the time went way beyond housing. In the '60s, Harlem was a hub of community self-help efforts, both mainstream and radical. In 1962, John F. Kennedy's Committee on Juvenile Delinquency funded two important Harlem youth development projects: Kenneth Clark's HarYou (Harlem Youth Opportunities Unlimited) and Representative Adam Clayton Powell's Associated Community Teams. Bey-Grecia moved here from Cincinnati with her opera singer mother in 1967 into a five story walk-up and wound up attending the legendary Harlem Prep, an experiment in community schooling that lasted only seven years "but produced so many leaders," Bey-Grecia says, "it's like they put something in the water."

But Harlem's attempts at uplift in the 1960s took place against a backdrop of white flight from New York City generally, eroding the tax base, and Johnson's escalation of the Vietnam War, which beggared War on Poverty funding and shattered the coalition of liberals behind civil rights and anti-poverty efforts. By the late 1970s, the city Housing Authority had taken over the West 114th Street apartments. By the time the Perrys were growing up, the block was a hub of poverty, drugs, and despair again.

As Harlem began to gentrify, the block got one more makeover. A public-private partnership descended and once again refurbished the street, one side at a time. Some feared it would become market-rate housing, but it didn't; it's now a mix of public housing and other units reserved for low-income families. It's quieter than it was when I moved in, before it was fully redone. Back then, the south side of the street was empty and under construction, while the north side still had tenants who congregated on stoops. Now the renovated stoops on both sides of West 114th Street seem smaller, as if to discourage street life.

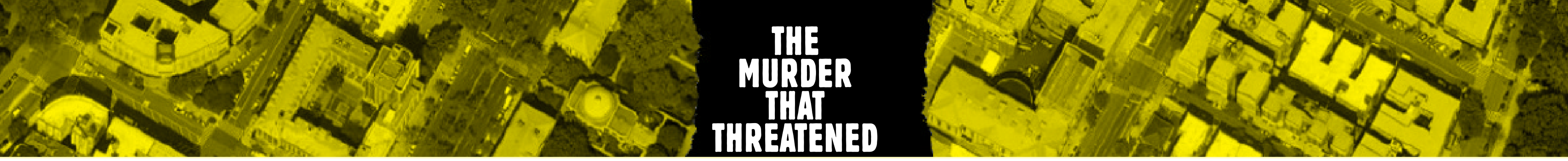
But unlike the Perry brothers, the teens accused of killing Majors didn't live in my actual neighborhood. As gentrification spreads, many lower-income black and Latino families like theirs have left my neighborhood and moved into East Harlem.

Two decades ago, you almost never saw a white resident in Harlem. But the neighborhood went from 2 to 14 percent white between 2000 and 2018.

WHAT PREOCCUPIED ACTIVISTS IN THE WAKE of the Majors killing was how to resist old narratives. Some feared a renewed outbreak of tension between longtime residents and gentrifiers, with the latter demanding more police protection and a crackdown on kids. Others anticipated a rerun of the deadly storyline about the 1985 Morningside Park killing: Despite the millions poured into Harlem social programs, the neighborhood remains blighted and dangerous, its young men feral and hopeless.

At first, the community seemed to splinter. At a candlelight vigil on the park steps the Sunday after Majors was killed, the mood turned foul. Hijacked by politicians, it left out in the cold the Barnard and Columbia students who just wanted to grieve together. When Representative Adriano Espaillat decried Harlem's past as a "war zone" and talked up the need for public safety, someone shouted from the crowd, "That's after-school programs!" objecting to the emphasis on police. Others booed when City Council Member Ydanis Rodriguez suggested the community had failed the teenage suspects. "There were people cheering when there were calls for more cops in the park, but then getting angry that it was political when [Rodriguez] talked about how we failed the 13-year-old suspect," a discouraged Meghan Brophy, a Barnard senior, told the *Columbia Daily Spectator*.

But in late January, a community forum hosted by Friends of Morningside Park drew 250 people to talk



about how to improve the neighborhood without locking it down. They weren't new ideas—more after-school programs, more jobs, more community mental health resources—but they were embraced with fervor by all sides of the park community. In the wake of the meeting, the Friends group got its single largest donation ever, anonymously, and local institutions, including the Mount Sinai hospital group, began looking for ways to help. "I felt really good after the forum, that things were starting to move in a positive direction," Taylor tells me. To Bey-Grecia, who raised her children here (now her grandchildren live here too), the gathering showed the best of this ever-changing neighborhood. She joined Friends of Morningside Park more than a decade ago, she recalls, when the group was largely white. "For me, it was important that the Friends be a diverse group.… We needed a voice on both sides of the park," she says.

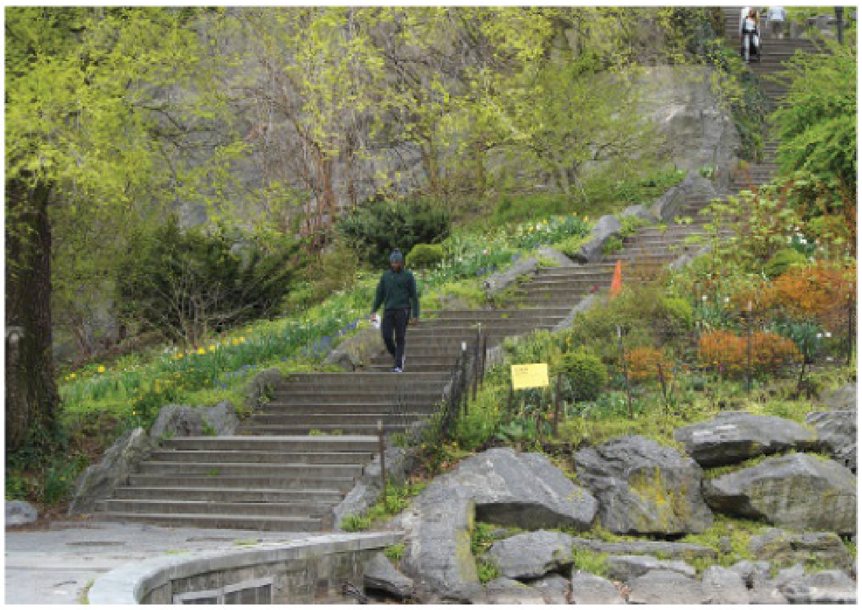
By most accounts, that exists now, with the Friends sponsoring a Father's Day basketball tournament and a fall Common Ground festival that Bey-Grecia is particularly proud of. "We get the Ebony Hillbillies and big board games, stilt walkers and face painters. A black ventriloquist. Kids and families from all walks of life meet at Common Ground. That's what it is: common ground."

"I don't know what's going to happen to it this year," she says sadly.

Even in the midst of the pandemic, an outsize police presence continued. Police cars left their emergency lights running all night, and dramatic towers of floodlights remained at some spots. Bey-Grecia, whose daughter lives on the eastern edge of the park, says, "I went to visit recently, and I asked her, 'What's going on? It's like a crime scene!'" It has made residents relive that horrible night in December over and over.

One thing gentrifiers and old-timers have in common: We fear what the coronavirus crisis will do to our community.

One thing gentrifiers and old-timers have in common: We fear what this pandemic will do to our community. Black and Latino New Yorkers have been hardest hit. Bey-Grecia tested positive for the coronavirus but recovered at home. A longtime Friends activist lost her daughter to the virus. Eleven members of the historic Mount Neboh Baptist Church, just around the corner from me, died of it in the first month of the lockdown. According to data provided by New York City's Department of Health, Harlem and Washington Heights zip codes have a higher number of coronavirus cases than almost all of Manhattan, and East Harlem has the highest number of all. The lawyers for the 13-year-old suspect have tried to get him out of juvenile detention, given the infections there, unsuccessfully so far.



Common ground: Friends of Morningside Park is a diverse community group that has worked for decades to improve the park.

ROB KIM / GETTY IMAGES

A month into our confinement, I asked Sekou what the kids she works with were doing. "They are hanging out at home. They are out in the hallways. They have no place to go," she said anxiously. One thing they were not doing, at least at the time, was taking the coronavirus seriously. She and a team of youth outreach workers had been going out wearing masks and gloves and trying to give them to young people. "At first, they just laughed at us. But one of those young people? His mother just died of the virus."

One of the things I miss most in this Harlem lockdown is the young people. From the parents picking up little ones at our many local schools to the teenagers who cluster outside bodegas when classes let out, laughing and flirting and beefing. The streets are joyful and chaotic most afternoons.

But in the weeks after the Majors killing, I have to admit, something changed a little in the teenagers—or in me. I always saw them as boys and girls; they could not, would not hurt me. Suddenly it occurred to me, what if they could? And some of them seemed less friendly and boisterous, more sullen and hostile, less likely to make way on the sidewalk for an older white lady walking her dog. And maybe they were, given the police dragnet sweeping their streets. Who wouldn't be? I didn't get the chance to puzzle it out. Was I projecting? And if not, would things go back to normal? Suddenly we were all in lockdown, and they were gone.

TRUMP HOVERS OVER THIS WHOLE STORY, NOT ONLY because he started his ruinous presidential run just as I came to live in Harlem. He's stoked racial division in New York since his realty company refused to rent to black tenants, since he demanded the death penalty for the Central Park Five, since he decried the end of New York's racist and unconstitutional stop-and-frisk policy and proposed it for the whole nation in 2016. Now he's hopelessly botched the coronavirus response, but since it has disproportionately hit blacks and Latinos, Republican lawmakers increasingly don't seem to care.

Majors grew up in Charlottesville, Va., where in August of 2017 neo-Nazis and white supremacists marched and a young white female counterprotester, Heather Heyer, was murdered by a white supremacist who ran her down with his car. That's when Trump assured us there were "very fine people, on both sides" of the demonstrations, just two summers after Dylann Roof murdered nine black churchgoers in Charleston.

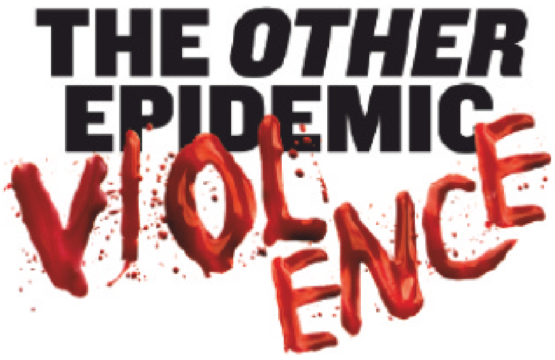
So Majors wasn't safe in majority-black Harlem, but Heyer wasn't safe in Majors's majority-white hometown, either. The Mother Emanuel nine weren't safe in a black church in Charleston. Yet we don't stigmatize all of Charleston for the 2015 murders or Charlottesville for the killing of Heyer. Why did so many stigmatize Harlem, so quickly, for the Majors killing? That's the virus, of racism and inequality, that gave us Trump, that the people here are fighting to shake, even in the wake of a horrible crime and deadly pandemic. I hope we get back to fighting it, and soon. ■

(continued from page 17)

despite being one of the world's homicide capitals. The microbreweries, beach cabanas, and casinos frequented by tourists have remained secure. When you map the city's homicides, you see the majority of them have occurred in Tijuana's southern and especially eastern additions, far from the wealthy beachside and downtown areas.

When I asked González why people turn to violence in his city, he sighed and leaned forward in his chair. "Listen, if you do not have the ability to make a living to support your family and there's an easy deal available and that deal is drug trafficking, then you're going to get into that deal," he said. "But if you have a good job that allows you to support your family honestly, to take care of them better, then there won't be the pressure to think of work on the other side."

While drug trafficking continues to affect the city, the crime in Tijuana today looks much different than it did in the late 2000s, when rival cartels battled it out in the streets. The fighting between the powerful narcos has largely died down, quite possibly because of a consolidation of control. Now the violence largely stems from something else. Tijuana is in the midst of a serious addiction crisis. *Cristal*, meth, has flooded the streets. Just as the opioid epidemic played out in economically blighted areas in the American heartland, so drug use skyrocketed in Tijuana as jobs and economic security cratered in the late 2000s. Today many of the homicides are targeted violence on a lower level, as street dealers fight to maintain control of their corners.



Experts like Ransford hope that we can come to see violence in the same way we're learning to see addiction. Instead of viewing it as a moral failing on the part of the addict, we've begun to understand it as a disease—and also as a symptom of a society's failure to provide jobs, community, and meaning. "When a person has been behaving violently, we believe deeply that that individual is having a health problem," Ransford said, "that they almost always have a history of exposure to violence in their lives."

In many ways, it's a disturbing reality to come to terms with: that violence is something universal to humanity. We all have the capacity to commit violence, and it's simply a question of the pressures that drive us to do so.

For many Americans, it's more comforting to think of the horrific violence playing out in Mexico as something essentially Mexican, something we can keep out with a border wall. However, any neighborhood in the United States could fall into the same perils if afflicted by the same social pressures. Indeed, many have.

If you follow the green road up the hill through the center of Camino Verde, past all the tin-roofed houses, a white, hypermodern building suddenly appears along the creek bed. Casa de las Ideas looks like a collection of clean white cubes and square portals. Out front, there's a small sculpture garden in a cobblestone patio. Behind the building, there's the half moon of an outdoor amphitheater.

Casa de las Ideas is a digital library opened in 2013 as part of an urban development effort in the neighborhood. Today it works like a community center for Camino Verde's youth. Every day, the library hosts educational and artistic programming for children and young adults.

Inside, Christian Zúñiga, an art professor from the Autonomous University of Baja California, explains that this work is a direct defense against the gangs that seek recruits in the neighborhood. "This is primary prevention," he said. "The pressure to engage in [criminal activity] begins early." The boys are recruited when they're still in primary school. "We try to establish different horizons. We try to change attitudes and predispositions by offering people new opportunities."

The idea behind the community center is that violence can be prevented, in part by connecting at-risk youth with education, career planning, and a safe place. (In addition to its attractive modernist design, the building's semibrutalist facade is as thick as a bunker.) Casa's mission has some similarities with Cure Violence's model. Instead of addressing violence by criminalizing local residents, it seeks to connect them with resources and opportunities.

At Casa de las Ideas, there's an understanding that the world can't be split into good people and bad guys. In a healthy, secure neighborhood, safety prevails; in a marginalized, exploited neighborhood, violence spreads like a disease. Anyone thrown into the dangers of a place like Camino Verde might pick up a gun. But the same people the cartels hope to recruit could become doctors or artists if placed in a different environment. Casa de las Ideas tries to create that environment.

When I asked Zúñiga for his ideas about the origins of "Mexican violence," he bristled at my phrase. "The weapons [the cartels] are using come from the United States, and people in the United States are [the ones] who buy the drugs," he said.

The United States is a world leader in drug consumption, and the clear majority of the guns in Mexico come from the US. So while the violence may play out south of the border, in many ways Zúñiga is right: It's not just Mexican violence; it's also American violence, killing Mexican people.

On a fall afternoon, Cruz met me at Casa de las Ideas. We spent some time admiring the architecture, then we drove along the riverbank. Along the way, we passed a variety of recently constructed facilities—a soccer field and playground, another community center, a tidy park.

"I think it's wonderful there are opportunities coming into the neighborhood," Cruz said. He credited being able to attend college as the reason he didn't fall into crime. He had other opportunities, other horizons.

As we drove along the dusty bank, he suddenly said, "Stop right here. This is the place."

We got out of the car in front of a building with a rundown facade painted an almost neon blue. It was the liquor store. "This is where they found his body," Cruz told me.

Quietly, we looked around. I wondered what it was like for him to be there now. Not just where they found Alejandro's body but in the same neighborhood where he was killed—the same neighborhood that killed him.

Cruz said that, at a certain point, he and his family gave up living in fear. Trying their best to stay safe, confining themselves to the house, felt like living in a prison.

"One gets tired of living with that fear. You decide, 'I'm just going to try to live a normal life.' You go outside again," he said. ■

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Letters

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The PLO: The Struggle Within, Matti Steinberg's *In Search of Modern Palestinian Nationhood*, and Yezid Sayigh's authoritative, 900-page *Armed Struggle and the Search for State: The Palestinian National Movement, 1949–1993*. None of these works support or even mention Chomsky or his theories.

Susie Linfield
BROOKLYN

Chomsky Responds

This correspondence began with Susie Linfield's charge [Letters, April 6] that I was lying about the 1976 Security Council resolution that called for a two-state settlement of the Israel-Palestine conflict, supported by Egypt-Syria-Jordan and tacitly by the PLO, rejected by Israel on the grounds, as Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin stated, that Israel must "vehemently oppose any tendency to establish a third state in the area between it and Jordan."

In response, I referred to my discussions of these topics, all accurate.

Responding, Linfield evades the refutation of her charges, complaining that I cited my own books—those that she claimed had lied—and dismissing the resolution because it was "never passed"—that is, was vetoed by the US. She now adds her primary claim: that "in calling for the refugees' return, it negated two states." In fact, Israel "vehemently" rejected the resolution precisely because it affirmed two states.

In brief, Linfield's proof that I was lying is that I review the historical and documentary record accurately, while she holds that Israel didn't know why it must reject the resolution—for reasons that were always on the margins, as the record then and since demonstrates, because it was understood on all sides how the issue could be finessed.

Linfield flings around other charges, which, on examination, suffer the same fate as her prime example.

There is a serious issue in the background. Israel's fateful decision to prefer expansion to security—one of the many examples I reviewed—has caused enormous harm to Palestinians and Lebanese and also to its own standing in the world, which has radically declined—matters that should trouble those who care about the society and its people. All deserve better than performances like this.

Noam Chomsky
ORO VALLEY, ARIZ.

Correction

The caption for an illustration in "Faces of the Crisis" by Molly Crabapple [May 18/25] identified three New Jersey phlebotomists in incorrect order. Their names, from left to right, are Kegga, Marissa, and Courtney.

letters@thenation.com

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TIPPING POINT

Thomas Piketty's new history of global inequality

by COLE STANGLER

On a Friday night early this past winter, two of France's left-wing intellectual heavyweights duked it out over a familiar question: What to do about private property? At the Paris Bourse du Travail, a union hall shared by the local branches of the country's major labor confederations, the radical economist Frédéric Lordon played to the crowd. Sporting a hoodie, light blue jeans, and navy sneakers, the fire-breathing Lordon called for abolishing and collectivizing all private property. In a collared shirt and dress shoes, his opponent, who for the last several years has been sounding the alarm about skyrocketing wealth inequality, found himself in an unfamiliar position. One of the world's foremost critics of capitalism, Thomas Piketty was making the case for moderation, or as he put it, a more lasting "radicality." "The false radicality of saying, 'We'll talk about it later, after the collapse of the current economic system' or 'We don't want any form of private property in the socialist or communist system we have in mind'—this is actually a very cheap radicality," Piketty insisted. "It's a radicality that doesn't scare anyone. The elimination of very small types of private property doesn't at all correspond to what's being asked or what is desirable from the point of view of individual emancipation."

A socialist future that allows for small-scale bakeries and restaurants might not be so bad, Piketty argued. Rather than abolishing all forms of private property, one could achieve an egalitarian and democratic society by more heavily taxing wealth and income and transferring power from shareholders to employees. When one of the moderators asked him if he believed in the prospects of the *Grand Soir*—the Great Evening, or the notion of an inevitable workers' revolution that has inspired generations of French leftists—Piketty fired back, "The

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Cole Stangler is a Paris-based journalist writing about labor and politics.

ILLUSTRATION BY **TIM ROBINSON**

Grand Soir is great, but it's the morning after that interests me most."

That seems a good way of summing up Piketty's approach overall. Trained by mainstream economists at Paris's School for Advanced Studies in Social Sciences and at the London School of Economics, he has always been more of a midcentury social democrat than a revolutionary. All the same, his interest in inequality has pushed him into terrain that has long been the domain of a more radical left—contemplating not only restrictions on wealth accumulation but also the political empowerment of ordinary people. This interest in tackling inequality was explored in the book that made him famous, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, which he concluded with a call for a global wealth tax. But in his follow-up, *Capital and Ideology*, Piketty has shifted gears. While he dedicates a large portion of the book to the history of economic injustice, he also offers a more fully fledged program aimed at making it disappear.

Capital in the Twenty-First Century arrived in France in 2013 (an English translation came out the following year), replete with rigorous insights into the history of wealth inequalities at a moment of growing backlash against them. Published less than three years after the explosion of Occupy Wall Street in the United States and amid the heady surge of left-wing parties in Greece and Spain, Piketty's work found a ready-made audience on both sides of the Atlantic. Not only did the economist delve into reams of tax data to show how the top 1 percent was getting ever richer, but he also made a bold claim about the very nature of capitalism itself. Capital's rate of return, he posited, is greater than the overall rate of economic growth. In other words, wealth grows faster than the rest of the economy, leading to increasingly concentrated inequality. Unless policy-makers respond with countervailing measures, capitalism does not produce a trickle-down effect; instead, it tends toward the reproduction of mass wealth disparities and thus to hardening class stratification. This imbalance isn't a glitch in the system but rather the natural product of the global economy left to its own devices.

For those who read *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* (or those who only read about those reading it), the appeal was obvious: Piketty had taken a wrecking ball to the claim that capitalism improves mass living standards over time, a contention that once divided the world in two but had become so ingrained in the ethos of the early 21st century that it hardly seemed worth discussing. And while some of Piketty's arguments weren't easy for the nonspecialist to digest, he managed to hammer home other points with elegance, quoting passages from Balzac and Jane Austen to remind readers of the long-term importance of inherited wealth and class status. Almost overnight, the book transformed him into a globe-trotting intellectual celebrity. It also renewed attention in France to a domestic violence case: In 2009, Piketty's former romantic partner Aurélie Filippetti, then a Socialist member of the French Parliament who later became minister of culture, filed a complaint against him, which was withdrawn after he apologized for having made her "suffer violence."

Capital and Ideology
By Thomas Piketty
Translated by Arthur Goldhammer
Harvard University Press. 1,104 pp. $39.95

Capital in the Twenty-First Century's popularity turned on a central insight: Piketty shifted the focus of his analysis away from income disparities to disparities in wealth. The rich aren't just getting ahead by earning more, though that's part of it; they're also outpacing the rest of us through their investments and homes and land, passed down from generation to generation. Because of this structural imbalance, Piketty insisted, only a global wealth tax, implemented by national authorities and coordinated on an international level, could begin to tame the power of capital. Although difficult to realize in comparison with the more expansive social democratic programs articulated by an emerging new left, a global wealth tax was a relatively modest proposal but one that was revelatory nonetheless. As the economist Stephanie Kelton, a former adviser to Bernie Sanders, put it, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* was "the right book at the right time."

Capital and Ideology is a different kind of book. Translated by Arthur Goldhammer, it moves from an account of wealth accumulation in the most advanced economies over the last few centuries to a sprawling exploration of inequality worldwide going back to the Middle Ages. In the process, Piketty wades a few steps further into the forbidding waters of politics. Opening with a look at the feudal societies of the premodern era and surveying the development of capitalism and colonialism, he then turns to communism and the heyday of social democracy in a brief study of the post–World War II era before ending with a chapter that outlines a "participatory socialism for the 21st century." This was the same set of proposals that he defended against Lordon in January and has been championing in the French press since the book's release last September. In both its ambition and tone, Piketty's socialism is not all that different from the parliamentary socialism of the early 20th century, but it marks a considerable move left for someone whose first forays into politics fell firmly within the mainstream of France's Socialist Party, which by the 1990s had abandoned any pretense of breaking with capitalism. In fact, *Capital and Ideology* goes well beyond anything proposed by the leading parties of the European left today, including Podemos in Spain and Jean-Luc Mélenchon's left-populist La France Insoumise.

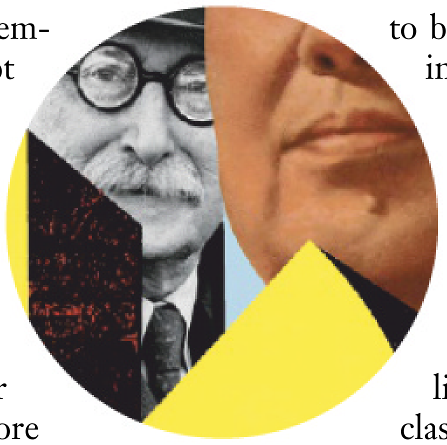
At just over 1,100 pages, Piketty's new book surpasses *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* in size and scope by a considerable extent; it is, in many ways, a far more ambitious work in both its range and its politics. For one thing, he expands his analysis of inequality beyond the major Western economies that constituted much of his earlier focus. He unpacks the concentration of wealth in colonial and slaveholding societies like British-occupied India, French-controlled Algeria, and prerevolutionary Haiti (which was, in 1780, the world's most unequal society, according to Piketty). Making stops in apartheid-era South Africa and contemporary Brazil, he also looks at the concentration of wealth—or lack thereof—in the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China.

This journey is not an abstract undertaking. As in his previous book, Piketty's quest to quantify and track inequality is grounded in a rigorous analysis of data (much of it tax returns but also censuses and government budgets). In *Capital and Ideology*, he also seeks to better explain how systems of inequality persist and justify themselves. In what is ultimately as much a work of history as of economics, Piketty wants to take "ideology seriously." Modern economics, he suggests, can shed light on an ultraspecific set of trends—say, how tax cuts for high-income earners affect wealth distribution and the gap between wage growth and productivity—but the dismal science often struggles to supply a larger picture of how these policies came into being, why they last, or how they operate across borders and regions. To truly understand inequality, he posits, one must think globally. And to think globally, one must also turn to politics—the politics of both the past and the future—and the ideological frameworks that justify social arrangements.

Piketty begins his story with Europe's "ternary" or "trifunctional" societies: feudal regimes in which the nobility, the clergy, and commoners all played rigidly defined roles. This system of rights and obligations began collapsing in the 16th century—most dramatically in France in the 18th century, where a revolution ushered in an awesome expansion of individual property rights. While the uprising was fueled in part by the promise of *égalité* and *fraternité*, these ideals fell largely by the wayside after the revolution. As Piketty shows, by the late 19th century, France was even more unequal than it was under the ancien régime.

The inequality in postrevolutionary Europe continued to increase until the early 20th century. Private sector wealth tumbled during World War I and the Great Depression, but it took an even larger global conflict for an alternative political framework to emerge. As states responded to the chaos of World War II, they moved quickly to take over key sectors of the economy; they also prolonged recent experiments with various types of taxes and granted new rights to workers. As a result, in France during the postwar years, the top 10 percent's stranglehold on wealth fell even further, as it did elsewhere in Europe. Around the same time in Soviet Russia, inequality remained even lower. Once slouching into rampant material disparities, many countries were now able to more fully realize the promise of equality and fraternity. The "proprietarian societies" (which Goldhammer helpfully translates as "ownership societies") that had come to dominate much of modern history proved to be not the natural and inevitable outcome of market forces but the result of specific decisions that prioritized individual property rights—decisions, moreover, that could be reversed. "Inequality," Piketty says, "is neither economic nor technological; it is ideological and political." After these ownership societies entered into a state of crisis in the early 20th century, social democratic governments emerged that vowed to tackle inequality and place limits on property rights. They imposed or extended taxes on income (and in some cases, wealth) and expanded access to education and housing. Many pursued the nationalization of key industries and, in the German and Nordic cases, forced businesses to share power with workers through innovative "co-management" measures.

But the glory days didn't last long. With an increasingly globalized economy came not just greater global inequality but greater domestic inequality as well. The European Union established a monetary federation, but it failed to achieve a fiscal or budgetary one—creating a situation today in which corporations can easily offshore and outsource production to the lowest bidder and the superrich can shelter their wealth with little pushback. Social democrats proved unable to adapt to these changing times and renew their platforms accordingly. Much the same happened in the United States: The conservative revolution ushered in a wave of deregulation and tax cuts, paving the way for the top 1 percent to amass more and more wealth while the American center-left failed to double down on its redistributive agenda and offer its base a convincing alternative. Today as a result, a "neo-proprietarian" order reigns supreme. Based in part on the values of the 19th century ownership societies, this order is also marked by an extreme form of meritocratic ideology, one that blames the poor for their struggles and idolizes billionaires for their success.



But if they stand so plainly against the collective interest, how do these proprietarian and neo-proprietarian societies sustain themselves in majoritarian systems? For Piketty, the answer is ideology. While Marx and Engels argued that the underlying material conditions and class structure of a given society held the key to understanding the resilience (or, for that matter, the fragility) of its political system, Piketty has a very different read on how authority reproduces itself. Class certainly influences the way people think, but so do other factors, from religious beliefs and a sense of national belonging to the seemingly random crises that occur throughout history, like famines and pandemics. Paradigm shifts are contingent on all of the above, not just on the formation of social classes or the tensions that arise among them. At the same time, in Piketty's view, ruling ideologies are themselves more fluid than Marxist intellectuals have historically recognized. Justifications for who gets to own what are ever capable of change and compromise, depending on the actors behind them—evolving, fading, or regenerating.

For example, the 19th century proprietarian order had its roots, Piketty argues, in what was originally a very simple goal: the separation of the state's authority—the provision of security and laws and a monopoly on violence—from the individual's right to hold and sell property. Making this separation was clear enough, but whether the state ought to then set limits on the latter remained an open question, as debates raged over whether to adopt land reforms to benefit small-scale farmers or impose progressive taxes on income or estates. In the end, the egalitarians lost out.

Piketty contends that this debate was settled through political choices—a marked contrast with both classical and neoclassical liberal economics, as well as classical Marxist economics, all of which tended to naturalize these changes as inevitable. Instead, a "fear of the void," as Piketty puts it, produced by the democratic revolutions of the late 18th century helped usher in the sacralization of private property. Whereas the old trifunctional system was held together by religion—a critical role performed by the clergy—the order that emerged in its wake initially lacked a mechanism to provide a similar sense of institutional stability. Ultimately, this void was filled by a quasi-religious worship of property. The resulting proprietarian societies, while genuinely emancipatory for some, were disastrous for many others, evolving in the 19th century into deeply inegalitarian and dehumanizing systems. As Piketty notes, when these governments finally abolished slavery, they directed financial compensation not to the enslaved, who had been denied a wage for the entirety of their lives, but to the former slaveholders.

While the original proprietarian order had its roots in democratic revolutions, the neo-proprietarian order has a very different origin. It was born, Piketty asserts, largely as a response to the spread of social democracy and fueled by a sense that redistributive policies had gone too far. After the popular breakthroughs of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, the fall of the Soviet Union only further entrenched the neo-proprietarians. Today's dominant order, then, marks a return to some of the earliest capitalist values: glorification of the supposedly individual accomplishments of the superrich, systematic bashing of the poor in the name of meritocracy, and incessant warnings against regulation for fear of opening

Pandora’s box. All of this has produced an intense backlash against even modest proposals to rein in property—notably by hindering governments’ ability to track the movement of wealth internationally.

While all of this will strike many readers as indisputably true, what may frustrate some is that Piketty never identifies a central force behind these world historical changes. There is no one motor, in his account, driving these conflicts forward. While Marx privileged class formation and class tensions, Piketty appears committed to unpacking each of the major transformations he identifies on its own terms, insisting on a multitude of alternative paths that might have been followed at any given moment. Some may find this approach nuanced; others may be put off by its unwillingness to dig in and take sides. The closest we get to a unifying theory of change comes at the book’s conclusion, when he turns to an oft-cited proclamation by Marx and Engels in *The Communist Manifesto*, “The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.” “Their assertion remains pertinent,” Piketty writes, “but now that this book is done, I am tempted to reformulate it as follows: the history of all hitherto existing societies is the history of the struggle of ideologies and the quest for justice.”

It doesn’t quite roll off the tongue like Marx and Engels’s original, and yet Piketty’s version does have a certain political urgency to it. Capitalism may encourage the concentration of wealth, and it may well be plainly unfair, but these aren’t sufficient conditions for an alternative to emerge, especially when the political and cultural arguments for the status quo are so widely accepted. To push back, therefore, we need to propose our own more egalitarian visions of society and rally large numbers of people behind them. A more just order is possible, though it remains conditional on our actions—like any other regime change in history.

The challenges to winning people over to a more egalitarian vision of society become clearest when Piketty turns to the origins of our current impasse. Refreshingly, these are not presented as some inevitable consequence of globalization or technological progress. Instead, they’re the product of a series of misguided—albeit reversible—political choices. Examining decades of voting patterns, Piketty shows how the historically center-left parties in the United States, France, and the United Kingdom evolved from what he calls “workers’ parties” into “parties of the educated.” In the period immediately following World War II, the various parties of the center-left—whether the Socialists in coalition with the Gaullists or the Democratic Party under Franklin Roosevelt and Harry Truman—all won the bulk of their support from voters with lower levels of education and income.

These parties, however, began to lose their working-class base in the 1960s and ’70s (and in the United States’ case, the 1950s), and by the 1990s, the old class cleavages had disappeared, with many working-class people feeling cast out from their traditional political homes and either voting for right-wing parties or not voting at all. For Piketty, then, it’s not a simple question of the center-left parties losing ground to the right; they also lost ground with their own base. A look at the coalitions behind François Hollande in France and Jeremy Corbyn’s strong showing in the UK in 2017 only clarifies this trend. Their candidacies garnered much greater support among the most-educated voters than with the least-educated ones.

How did such a dramatic reversal come about? A common hypothesis is that white working-class voters were increasingly receptive to the nativist and racist ideas on the rise. This may be partly true, but it does not account for the losses and diminished enthusiasm among other working-class voters at the same time. The bigger reason, Piketty argues, is that social democratic parties abandoned the cause of wealth redistribution. By accepting the terms of Reaganomics and Thatcherism, the historical parties of the left embraced a much more scaled-back view of what constitutes a fair society and lost the faith of their working-class base. Placing a higher value on things like educational achievement, public access to culture, and somewhat higher taxes on the wealthy, the members of what Piketty dubs the “Brahmin left” gave up on the very redistributive politics that had won support among a low-to-middle-income electorate.

As the parties of the left lost their historical base, Piketty continues, right-wing parties began to absorb parts of it. They continued to defend the same elite economic interests as before, but they also attracted many white working-class voters, weaponizing questions of race and identity to win them over. This “merchant right,” Piketty argues, became the high-income counterpart to the Brahmin left and proved to be better at attracting certain segments of the working-class vote.

To be sure, this balance is deeply unstable, as shown by France’s most recent presidential race, which saw the emergence of both a rejuvenated left-wing bloc and an energized far right—only for a Brahmin liberal to win office. The ongoing battles in the Democratic Party illustrate similar tensions, with figures like Joe Biden and Pete Buttigieg defending the values of the Brahmin left against an insurgent wing demanding that the party reverse its hands-off approach to inequality and once again represent the interests of working people. While Piketty completed his book before the US primaries began, it’s not hard to imagine what he might say about the candidacy of Bernie Sanders. Though it clearly wasn’t enough to win him the Democratic nomination, Sanders’s popularity underscores the value of debating the state’s role in regulating and, yes, managing the economy.

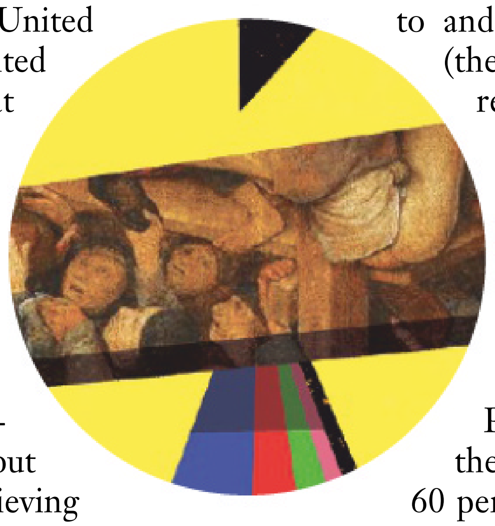
In the last 70 pages of *Capital and Ideology*, Piketty outlines what a “participatory socialism” in the 21st century might look like. The first pillar of his program, “social ownership,” involves curtailing the influence of managers and shareholders and boosting the decision-making power of employees. Under his proposal, workers would receive half the seats on companies’ boards of directors, with a ceiling imposed on the voting rights of investors composing the other half, thereby limiting the power of large shareholders. The second pillar, “temporary private ownership,” involves enacting a set of progressive and, ideally, internationally coordinated taxes on property, inheritance, and income. All of this is complemented by what Piketty calls “inheritance for all,” a lump sum grant to citizens once they reach the age of 25. (He suggests the sum be set at just over $130,000 in France today.) He stresses that these proposals are an initial blueprint more than anything else, a vision to be tinkered with according to circumstances rather than a political program to be followed to the letter. “Justice,” he writes, “must always be conceived as the result of ongoing collective deliberation.”

While it may seem self-evident in the United States to call this program socialist, Piketty’s use of the S-word in France is a bit more fraught. Tarnished by decades of compromise and failure to live up to the ideas in its platform, in particular during Hollande's time in office, the Socialist Party has been part of the Brahmin left as much as any center-left party and has lost much of its support on the national level. In response to the party's many letdowns, its rivals on the French left today often avoid talk of socialism, appealing instead to the values of humanism, solidarity, and ecology, or—in the case of Mélenchon's movement—calling for a citizens' revolution. But what else is one supposed to call an international project that involves radically overhauling property rights in favor of ordinary people? As a political tradition stretching back more than 150 years, the idea of socialism still seems a worthy goal, whether fully attainable or not, and its rich history offers lessons, warts and all. In Europe, that means owning the victories, mistakes, and betrayals of the past, while in the United States, it means signaling a clear desire to leave behind a system that's increasingly unpopular and unsustainable.

The emphasis on internationalism in *Capital and Ideology* is also important. In recent years, Europe has seen a rise in nationalism. As parties like Alternative for Germany, France's National Rally, and Italy's Lega have discovered, refocusing popular ire from large-scale property owners to bureaucrats in Brussels can pay handsome political dividends. In pursuit of very different goals, some on the left (most notably Mélenchon) have also directed much of their venom toward the EU. Its suffocating budgetary restrictions and democratic deficit are worthy of denunciation, no doubt, but sometimes the left-populist criticism can feel cheap—a diversion from other pressing issues, if not an excuse for old-fashioned flag-waving. The bigger question either way, assuming one rules out leaving the EU, is how to change it. Piketty calls for cross-border cooperation, and this should be obvious. Whether or not his entire platform is achievable in the short term, the reality is that anything close to it would all but require help from abroad to succeed: a bevy of allied countries adopting common policies, collectively disobeying certain EU rules, and investing political capital in revising treaties. As the coronavirus crisis has shown, Brussels's diktats can be broken under the right circumstances and with sufficient political will. With countries dramatically ramping up their deficit spending to protect their citizens, the EU has suspended requirements for its members to reduce their deficits and limit their debt-to-GDP ratios.

As the world reels from the horrifying devastation of the pandemic, the centrality of an internationalist politics becomes all the more urgent. Economic and material security cannot be secured in one country alone, nor can a participatory socialism defend itself from global problems, whether epidemiological or economic. In certain left-wing and environmentalist circles, the crisis has reignited criticism of international trade and sparked calls to promote more local production of goods and services. Rewiring global supply chains is a worthy goal, but even this would require international collaboration, as would any hopes of boosting working-class power, redistributing vast amounts of wealth, and submitting the economy to democratic oversight. There is no way to durably achieve these aims on a solely national scale.

Of course, as the fallout from the Covid-19 pandemic and the global recession set in, there is no guarantee that Piketty's "neo-proprietarian order" will not come out even stronger. Already the pace of change is breathtakingly fast. While most European states have agreed to cover large shares of the wages lost by workers and as some consider outright takeovers of certain companies, EU leaders have also refused to come to the direct aid of Italy and Spain, revealing their stubborn attachment to the eurozone's flawed architecture. The United States, meanwhile, has limited its relief to a bailout that includes $1,200 in direct payments to millions of Americans but also sends hundreds of billions of dollars to corporations, with precious few strings attached. Against this backdrop, Piketty's proposals don't seem far-fetched, but the political nature of achieving them appears all the clearer. Things could change in the coming months, but without a wave of working-class pressure and movements that fundamentally threaten the leaders and parties in charge, the making of the post-coronavirus world will be left to the same ruling elites that brought us this mess in the first place.



Ironically, when it comes to enacting "participatory socialism," Piketty's reading of history suggests that radicals who scoff at electoral politics may have a point. Rather than through the ballot box alone, *Capital and Ideology* suggests, the great ideological transformations of the past often resulted from crises that unmade the previous order: recessions, wars, and revolutions. We appear to be at such a tipping point right now. But one also wonders what gets left out by a vision of history that privileges ideas to such a large extent. At its most extreme, it can obscure the fact that there are certain groups that simply aren't interested in a good-faith debate—not because they haven't been convinced yet but because they have a vested material interest in not listening at all. No matter how sensible the counterargument may be, most billionaires will oppose wealth taxes and most bosses pay hikes. Ongoing debates about economic aid in Europe have underscored the same point. Despite all the damage they risk inflicting on the future of the EU, despite the fact that some of their closest neighbors are grappling with humanitarian catastrophe, the business elites of Germany and the Netherlands continue to oppose direct cash subsidies for Italy and Spain along with even modest proposals to issue jointly backed European debt, all because existing arrangements offer them a slight competitive advantage. Immediate material self-interest, it seems, often trumps the more rational long-term choice.

Piketty's latest work offers us plenty of valuable ideas. But in the end, one can't help but wonder if he underplays the extent to which individuals' access to and relationship with wealth (their position in the property regime, one might say) influences how they look at the world and engage in politics. Ultimately, the interests that unite the top one-tenth of 1 percent of wealth holders may be a bit stronger than Piketty suggests, not unlike the ties that bind the bottom 60 percent or so. Piketty's views on this mark a clear departure from the Marxist conception of class, yet his open-ended vision of historical change still offers space for popular agency. After all, whatever label one prefers—the "working class," "the multitude," "the people," or something else—it remains up to us to build the movements and organizations required to make a world better suited to human needs. And perhaps someday, the myths we tell ourselves about why things are the way they are will be considered every bit as cruel and irrational as those of the past and will cease to be specters that haunt our present. ■

THE SHOCK OF RECOGNITION

Cathy Park Hong's Asian America

by JANE HU

When I was growing up, I would try to sit as far away as possible from any other Asian girl who happened to be in the same room. This applied largely to institutional settings—school, swim lessons—where experience had taught me that proximity was the surest path to our being confused with each other. My sense of individualism, it seemed, hinged on the rejection of racial conflation, to say nothing of racial solidarity. But by preemptively refusing affiliation with that other Asian girl, I had already absorbed the ambient racism of my white instructors and schoolmates. I did not yet understand how viewing her as a generalization implicated my internalization of anti-Asian sentiments.

Cathy Park Hong's bracing new book, *Minor Feelings: An Asian American Reckoning*, begins with a similar anecdote about two Asian women in irreconcilable conflict. More specifically, it begins with two Korean American women—Hong and a potential new therapist—who fail to get on. Hong suspects it is because of their shared ethnicity. Where likeness might enable a more productive therapeutic relationship, Hong encounters only further animosity. After the therapist finally rejects her increasingly desperate overtures, Hong leaves what she calls a "long screed" of a review on the website RateMyTherapist: "Koreans are repressed! Rigid! Cold! They should not be allowed to work in the mental health care profession!" At an appointment with a new therapist (this time Jewish), Hong spends most of the session retracing the traumas of her first. While the new therapist affirms her feelings about the previous one's unprofessionalism, she also wonders whether Hong's "personal history was somehow *too* close to the first therapist's, issues that she herself had not fully processed."

For Hong, the phenomenon of being "too close"—an overidentification that paradoxically produces alienation—is also a condition of being Asian American. This initial episode of antagonism becomes just one of many examples for Hong of such

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Jane Hu is an English PhD candidate at the University of California, Berkeley, and a writer living in Oakland.

ILLUSTRATION BY **DIANE ZHOU**

alienation. Disidentification is what often unites the Asian American experience, she writes; many Asian Americans find themselves caught in what she calls "minor" racial conflicts (one could call them microaggressions, except they occur intraracially).

The feelings that arise from these racial conflicts are the subject of Hong's book. She is interested in how these minor antagonisms limit Asian American expression and representation. To make her argument, Hong draws from literary theorist Sianne Ngai's theory of "ugly feelings"—those weak and dysphoric emotions such as envy, irritation, and boredom that, Ngai argues, are symptomatic of late capitalism. For Hong, they are also symptomatic of a society organized by racial inequality. Because Asian Americans have historically been stereotyped as meek, recessive, invisible, their emotional vocabulary has similarly inhabited a more muted register. They occupy, she writes, "the racialized range of emotions that are negative, dysphoric, and therefore untelegenic." Not only are these minor Asian American feelings defined by a more depressive range of emotion—shame, resentment, paranoia, and melancholy—but their lack of catharsis also means they linger for a long time. The crux of Hong's book, then, is this: How does one tell an Asian American story that captures the full range of these minor feelings, their complexity, their pathos, their commonness, without simply lapsing into conventions of disappearance and weakness so deeply associated with being Asian American?

Minor Feelings
An Asian American Reckoning
By Cathy Park Hong
One World. 224 pp. $27

Hong achieves this by fully attending to Asian America's many weak and ugly feelings. Rather than commit to one strong narrative, *Minor Feelings* embraces the contradictions at the center of her book's argument. Each essay weaves between biographical anecdotes and historical events. An author of three poetry collections, Hong is uniquely adept at negotiating rhetorical indeterminacy. Her 2012 book *Engine Empire* narrates the birth of a nation—from the American frontier to a semifictional Chinese city called Shangdu to a futuristic California—by modulating across different voices. In speculating on a shared constellation of themes, Hong's poetry also contains the seeds of her new book: American exceptionalism, a mythical Asian imaginary, capitalist expansion. And while *Minor Feelings* is Hong's first work of nonfiction, the stylistic traces of her eclectic and episodic poetic style persist even here. The chapters are each organized around a general theme, such as "The End of White Innocence" or "The Indebted," but they scatter—as does her poetry—across a range of perspectives and genres.

In a chapter titled "Stand Up" that documents Hong's unexpected identification with the comedian Richard Pryor, she describes her frustration with the "conventional forms in which racial trauma is framed." While the confessional mode's presumptions of universalism make her queasy, traditional realism also feels dubious for its claim to anthropological authenticity. Tired of how publishers fixate on what the novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie describes as the ethnic "single story"—which shows "a people as one thing, as only one thing, over and over again"—Hong chooses instead to fracture that story, spilling it across multiple genres.

Sometimes this fracturing can look like a masochistic form of comedy, as when Hong tries stand-up herself. At other times, writing about race is a fervent "polemic, in that we must confront the white capitalist infrastructure that has erased us." But it can also be, she reminds us, "a lyric, in that our inner consciousness is knotted with contradictions."

Her book is ultimately less a definitive document of the Asian American experience than it is a document of Hong's attempts (and frequent failures) to articulate its contradictions. Because of Asian America's relatively "minor" status as a racial minority, Hong seeks to make visible an underrepresented racial experience, even as she often voices the discomfort and difficulty of doing so. Yet this ongoing discomfort is ultimately crucial to Hong's articulation of Asian American minor feelings—a set of negative emotions that cannot be expressed except in their ambivalence, their irreconcilability.

"For as long as I could remember," Hong writes, "I have struggled to prove myself into existence." With *Minor Feelings*, she simultaneously grapples with associated anxieties about her potential disappearance in writing on behalf of the Asian American subject. "I began this book as a dare to myself," she explains, because "I still clung to a prejudice that writing about my racial identity was minor and non-urgent." Yet even in the final product, this anxiety about the potential indulgence of the project can be felt. One of the dominant minor feelings in the book is, after all, Hong's guilt—a guilt only heightened in the very act of talking about it. This book is indeed a reckoning: a willing to make oneself visible and heard. It is also an apology.

While Hong relishes identifying with Pryor's caustic wit and rage, she demurs from overidentification. In watching him move between the racial stereotypes around black-white relations, she finds herself disoriented: "One minute I'm laughing at white people, and feeling the rage of black oppression as if it's my own, until the next bit, when I realize I'm allied with white people."

A concern with the notion that Asian Americans are "next in line to be white" can be found in almost every essay in *Minor Feelings*. Hong is attuned to the relationship between Asian racialization and American capitalism, as Asian American assimilation has almost always relied on economic advancement. It is, after all, one of the reasons Ngai's model of capitalist ugly feelings maps so well onto Hong's matrix of Asian American minor feelings. And while she often cites theorists such as Frantz Fanon and W.E.B. Du Bois, Hong is careful to distinguish the Afro-Anglophone experience from the privileges associated with Asian American capitalist success. Stuck between racial abjection and economic exceptionalism, she frequently finds her voice receding into a murky absence. "When I hear the phrase 'Asians are next in line to be white,'" she writes, "I replace the word 'white' with 'disappear.'" For Hong, the specter of disappearance is inextricable from Asian America's economic and cultural capital. A professor at Rutgers University–Newark, Hong is ever conscious of how Asian America's rising economic and cultural capital helps promote this notion of disappearance. Part of the challenge in writing about Asian America's minor feelings is doing so in a way that does not simply reiterate Asian American racial capitalism.

Hong struggles with this dilemma throughout *Minor Feelings*. What does it mean to write for a racial minority that must nonetheless circulate within a largely white publishing community and readership? Is it even possible? While she touches on the radical origins of "Asian American," she is aware that the term has since been commodified by the publishing world. An MFA graduate of the Iowa Writers' Workshop, Hong is no stranger to how literary institutions produce racial capital. Early on, she describes an overwhelming anxiety that her graduate peers could read her only through her Asian identity—a strategy of capitalizing on her ethnicity that the younger Hong finds "juvenile." Fearing that others will label her as merely an identitarian poet, she chooses instead to be a "good student of modernism" with its commitment to abstraction and universalism.

When Hong starts publishing, she learns that her poetry gets read through her Asian female identity regardless of what she writes, and at readings she finds herself almost always addressing a mostly white audience. "There was no denying it," she concludes. "I was performing for a roomful of bored white people and I desperately wanted their approval." Although *Minor Feelings* seeks to reject this white approval, the specter of whiteness haunts the book. "Even in opposition," Hong explains, "I still see my life in relation to whiteness."

Hong's struggle to detach from the value system of American capitalism and its reproduction of white prestige resonated with my own experience in university settings, where the aesthetic virtues of Anglo-American modernism still tend to dominate academic inquiry. Like Hong, I too began to feel what she describes as "a kind of despair" about the fact that there might be no way to write about a personal racial condition that does not lapse into a self-annihilating appeal for the approval of white people.

Yet as one moves through *Minor Feelings*, one begins to see how, beside her rejection of white affirmation, there exists a more affirmative story of Asian American collectivity: A minor plot of the book, scattered across its chapters, is one of racial solidarity. A poetry reading Hong gives at Western Michigan University is particularly illustrative. As the event wraps up, a Korean American student goes up to her and starts crying after describing "how alone and alienated she felt on campus." They hug. "It is for her," Hong thinks, "that I'm writing this book."

Hong offers another example later. Writing about the women in Dai Sil Kim-Gibson's 1993 documentary *Sa-I-Gu*, which features Korean American shopkeepers whose businesses were burned down during the Los Angeles riots in 1992, Hong notes, "Interview after interview…I experienced another shock of recognition…. They are like my aunts." For Hong, these anecdotal instances of recognition begin to add up to the major narrative impulse that drives *Minor Feelings*. They are why she is writing this book.

This minor plot necessarily emerges piecemeal. Readers repeatedly glimpse characters like the Los Angeles shopkeepers through Hong's experiences of identification and disidentification. They are found in the personal and the anecdotal: the rejection of the Korean American therapist or the embrace of the Korean American student. They also prove to be a more general theme, appearing across the book like a heterogeneous Asian American grouping that Hong works to make visible, however fleetingly. Like the minor feelings that are the book's named subject, their presence—and their persistence—occurs through their serial invocation, their cumulative semblances.

A chapter titled "Bad English" sits at the midpoint of *Minor Feelings* and functions as a pivot away from the more polemical ground setting in the book's first half to the more intimate interventions in its second. Rather than advance any theses about contemporary Asian America, "Bad English" offers a searching and introspective examination of the very language that makes *Minor Feelings* possible—the literary forms that enable Hong to speak to and on behalf

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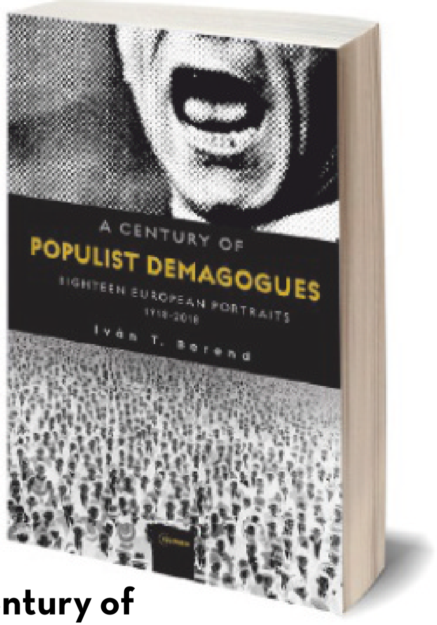
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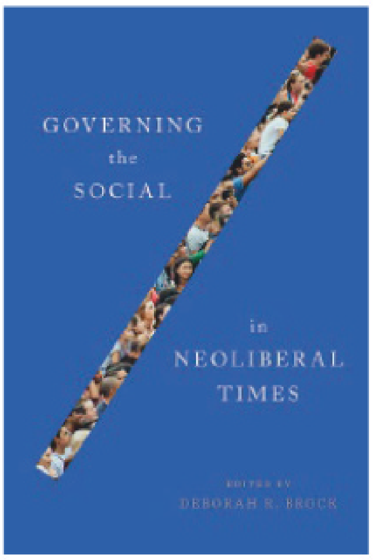
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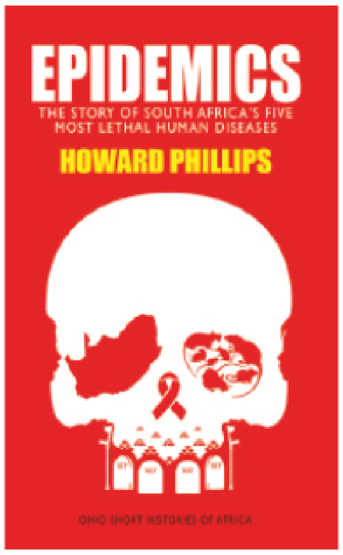
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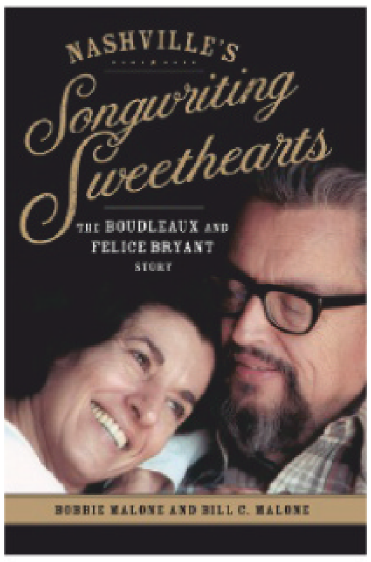
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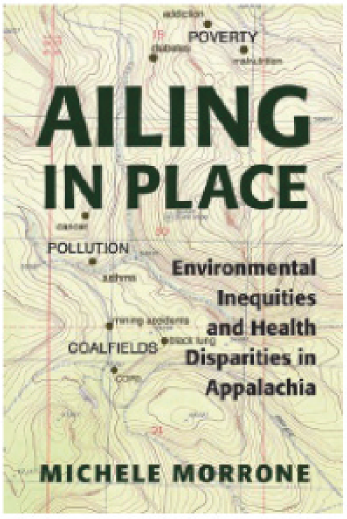
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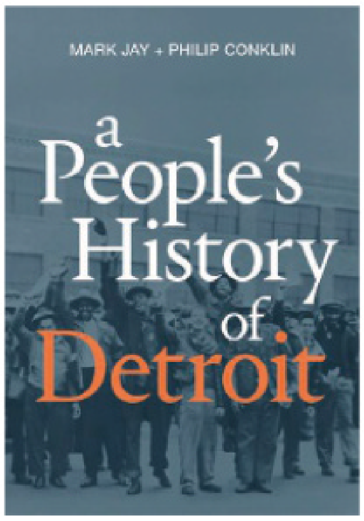
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a People's History of Detroit

A People's History of Detroit

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> "*A People's History of Detroit* finally allows us to look beyond the mythology of the Motor City, the ruin porn, and the boosterism, and to grasp the dialectic of redevelopment and dispossession, accumulation and abandonment, that has defined its history for a century. Mark Jay and Philip Conklin's book is a model of militant research, recovering the city's traditions of resistance and revealing the staggering human cost behind the hype about the 'New Detroit.'" —Alberto Toscano

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of the contradictions of being Asian American. The chapter ends with a series of unanswerable questions that strike me as a kind of renunciation of the more public-facing writing of the initial chapters:

> Can I write honestly? Not only about how much I’ve been hurt but how I have hurt others? And can I do it without steeping myself in guilt, since guilt demands absolution and is therefore self-serving? In other words, can I apologize without demanding your forgiveness? Where do I begin?

In the chapter that follows, “An Education,” Hong begins to answer some of these questions and in doing so produces one of the more thrilling essays of the book. Here, she documents her friendship with Erin and Helen—two other Asian female artists—as students at Oberlin College. “An Education” is not only a *Künstlerroman* in miniature; it also functions as a story of Asian American female friendship that I realized, upon reading, felt rare only in its literary representation. Hong, Erin, and Helen form an obsessive bond that is both painful and necessary. While they frequently experience conflict (especially the mercurial Helen, who is no longer part of Hong’s life), the friendship is clearly formative in not just a personal but also an artistic way. “When I made art alone, it was a fantasy,” Hong writes, “but shared with Erin and Helen, art became a mission.”

Throughout “An Education,” Hong renders their friendship—while often volatile and sometimes even violent—in a way that feels crucially vital. It is an artistic friendship that exceeds the sum of its parts. “I had intended to write only about Erin,” Hong admits toward the essay’s end, long after she’s spilled so many of the details and traumas of Helen’s life, but for Hong, her relationship with Erin was inextricable from the one she had with Helen.

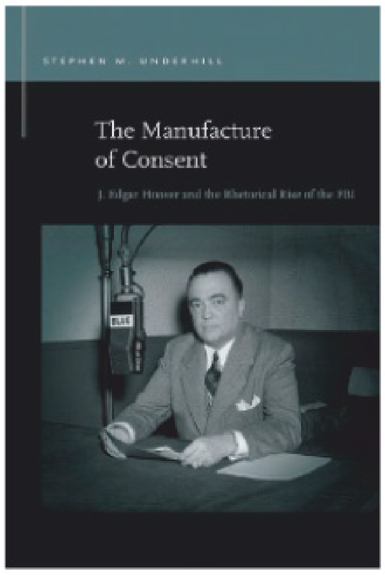
Minor Feelings begins with intraracial antagonism, but it ends by trying to envision something closer to a form of intraracial solidarity. After “An Education,” Hong writes about the relatively underexamined rape and murder of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, who is best known for writing the 1982 experimental autobiography *Dictée*. While scholars have pored over Cha’s avant-garde masterwork, which mixes genres and languages in narrating the lives of radical women such as Joan of Arc and Yu Guan Soon, Hong wonders what is lost by overlooking the more personal details of Cha’s death. While sympathetic to the concern of potentially fetishizing these events, she is baffled by “the length to which scholars will argue how Cha is recovering the lives of Korean women silenced by historical atrocities while remaining silent about the atrocity that took Cha’s own life.” Her essay seeks to reconstruct, if not quite popularize, Cha’s life for a broader audience.

Drawing on court records as well as interviews with Cha’s brother John and her friend Sandy Flitterman-Lewis, Hong tells this story through an idiosyncratic archive that is both impersonal and so intimate as to be familial. Whereas legal documents provide only inconclusive information about Cha’s life and death, John offers the kind of biographical texture about her typically omitted by scholarship on Cha. Hong weaves herself into Cha’s story, saying how a teacher at Oberlin, the Korean American avant-garde poet Myung Mi Kim, first told her about *Dictée*. “By introducing me to Cha, my professor Kim established a direct, if modest, literary link: Cha, Kim, myself”—a genealogy of Asian American feminist aesthetic avant-gardism that might also include Erin and Helen.

Given Hong’s gesture to this personal genealogy, it is perhaps unsurprising that her final chapter ends on a note of debt, looking backward at the immigrants and political movements that now make her and her book possible. Likewise, Hong’s theoretical citations throughout the book show her indebtedness to other scholars of race—contemporary, Asian American, and otherwise. A look at the press blurbs for *Minor Feelings*, which include quotes from Claudia Rankine, Alexander Chee, and Kiese Laymon, also gives the reader a sense of the contemporary literary community that enables this book. *Minor Feelings*, then, stretches out along a broader network of not just racial but also intellectual circulation.

In ending on debt, Hong expresses an important fact of Asian American solidarity. As much as we might wish to reject one another—to reject other Asians as a way to affirm ourselves—our experiences are only as real as they are shared. One’s own Asian American story might begin with an anecdote as well, but it is also a part of a broader history as we begin to string them together. The very history of the term “Asian American” captures this dynamic—as it emerges from the radical student movements of the late 1960s, especially the Third World Liberation Front, which emphasized pan-Asian and cross-racial solidarity.

Such an act of collective storytelling seems increasingly necessary, given the rise of anti-Asian sentiment during the coronavirus pandemic. Writing for *The New Yorker’s* website, the novelist Ed Park wonders if his recent racist encounter with a man on the streets of New York City merited “minor feelings or major.” One xenophobic encounter might feel “not that remarkable,” but as his piece goes on to list, a series of instances of anti-Asian discrimination suggests a different story. What a strange time to be thinking about Asian American disappearance; I have never felt more anxiously visible. Yet it is a visibility that need not only be unwelcome. At such a time—taking my allotted daily constitutionals, standing in line for groceries—I scan the scene, wondering if I’ll see anyone else who looks like me. ■


STEPHEN M. UNDERHILL
The Manufacture of Consent
J. Edgar Hoover and the Rhetorical Rise of the FBI

The Manufacture of Consent

J. Edgar Hoover and the Rhetorical Rise of the FBI

BY STEPHEN M. UNDERHILL

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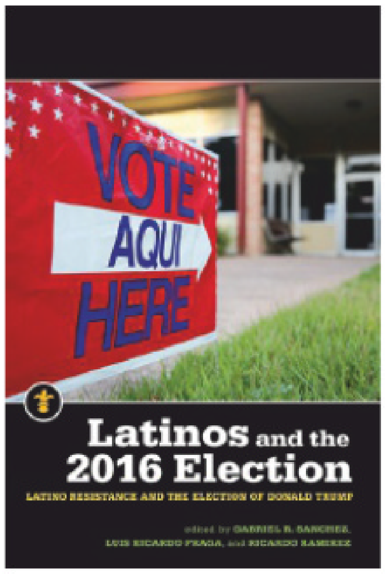
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edited by GABRIEL R. SANCHEZ, LUIS RICARDO FRAGA, and RICARDO RAMÍREZ

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Latino Resistance and the Election of Donald Trump

EDITED BY GABRIEL R. SANCHEZ, LUIS RICARDO FRAGA, AND RICARDO RAMÍREZ

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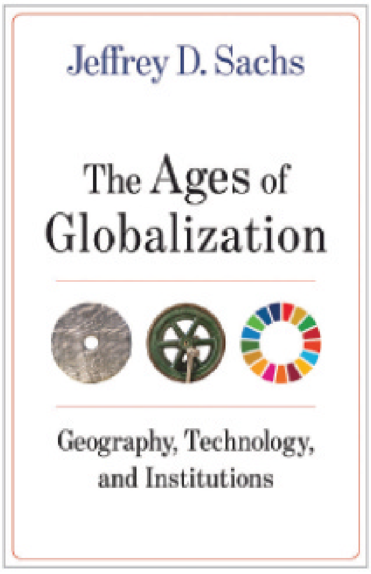
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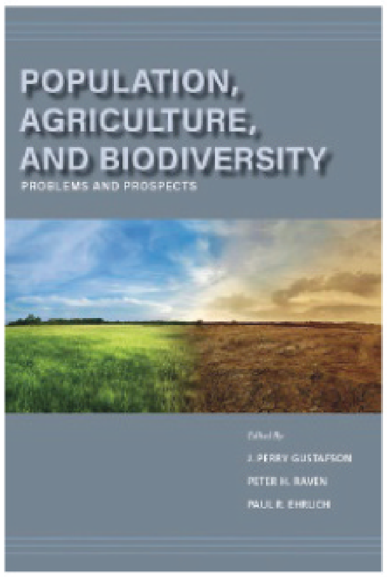
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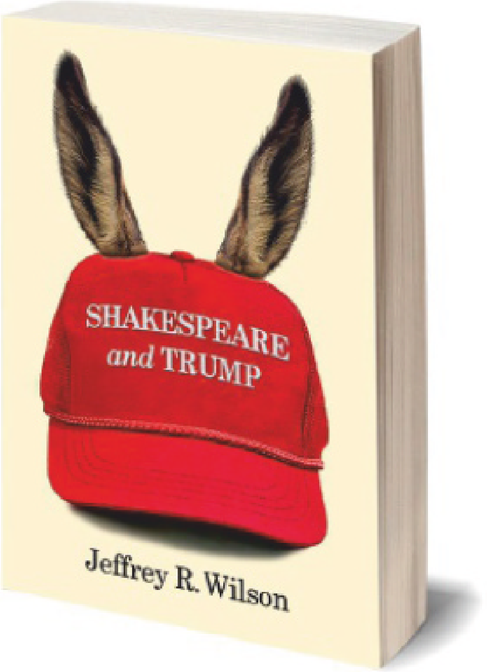
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Jeffrey R. Wilson

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BY JEFFREY R. WILSON

"'What means that trump?' Jeffrey Wilson sounds the Shakespearean resonances of the presidency, from controversial productions to what he terms 'politicitation.' Animated by a frank, searching voice, Wilson's book energetically chronicles our dramatic moment—and how it might end." —Scott Newstok, author of *How to Think Like Shakespeare: Lessons From a Renaissance Education*

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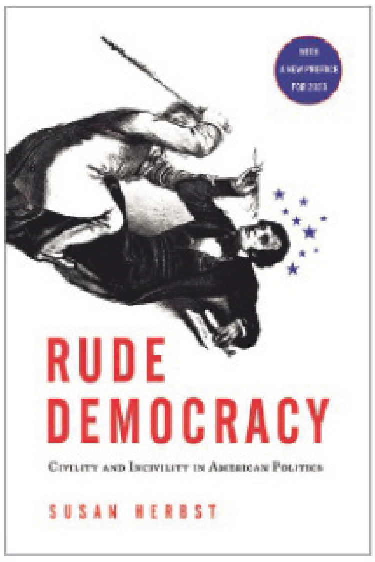
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Q&A

SAMANTHA IRBY

Samantha Irby's essays are equal parts confessional and raunchy, vulnerable and raw. Her work spans defecation disasters and the travails of dating and grief.

She published her first collection, 2013's *Meaty*, while working as a receptionist at an animal hospital. Since then, she's released two more essay collections. In her most recent, *Wow, No Thank You*, she navigates life changes like settling into married life and parenting and making friends as an adult.

As in her previous books, she plays with the formal structure of the essay. Fluent in the language of the Internet, she tells her stories through memes, lists, and run-on sentences as she documents her body's various betrayals, often in grotesque and painstaking detail.

I spoke with Irby about privacy, chronic illness, and how to enjoy social media.

—Rima Parikh

RP: In "Hung Up!" you write about the joys of being on your phone. How do you stay sane on the Internet?

SI: Here's the tea. You have to mute and unfollow shit that stresses you out. First of all, I deleted my Facebook. That was step one. It's not a moral thing, like, "Oh, *privacy*." I don't give a shit about any of that. The whole format stressed me out. Once you've friended friends of friends of friends, it's hard to go through and delete people. Scorched-earth Facebook—it's been like a year and a half. No regrets. Instagram is easy, because if there's someone you feel like you need to follow out of obligation but their posts drive you batshit, you just mute them. On Twitter, I mute words. The mute function is truly the greatest social media gift.

RP: Do you feel that strangers talk to you as if they know you—and if so, is that weird?

SI: All the time. I never get offended when someone is too familiar, because they just read 400 pages of my intimate stuff. I would be such a shithead if I were like, "Uh, don't talk to me like you know me." You *do* know me. You just don't know all of it. The parts that I keep to myself are really the most undesirable parts, so they know my best self. I like that.

RP: You describe chronic illness in a way that's funny but doesn't diminish it. How do you strike that balance?

SI: My knee-jerk response to everything is to find the nugget of humor, because when shit is so terrible, I need to know, "Can I laugh at that? What's the part of that that will make me laugh?" And then it feels manageable. If you can find the one absurd piece, it's like, "OK, this is ridiculous. I can deal with this."

People find their empathy center better when they're laughing. I never want anyone to think it doesn't hurt or that it's not inconvenient or I'm not struggling, because that's not it, either. It's just like, "Well, I gotta talk about why being this sick with no health insurance is a crime but also why being this sick and still trying to date and explaining to my hookup why I'm wearing a Depends is also hilarious." That is me boiled down to my essence—trying to make somebody laugh while not wanting you to laugh so much that you don't feel sorry.

RP: With "Body Negativity," you detail insecurities about individual body parts to show how impossible women's beauty standards are. What was the experience of writing that?

SI: It felt like I was really doing something with it. I was like, "What are all the things that are 'required' of us? How are we made to feel we can do any of these things, let alone all of them?" It's impossible for my toes to look nice and my eyebrows and also to have a job. All of these things can't be done! I was really feeling like people are going to read that and they're going to understand. It was my mini-rage against the machine.

RP: What's the process of reliving embarrassing moments? Do you have a journal?

SI: Where shame is concerned, it's imprinted on my psyche. If I need to tap into embarrassing moments, it's half a second of thinking, and it's right there in vivid detail. That kind of pain does not dull with time. Anytime I've made a fool out of myself, it still stings. If I had a journal, I would probably burn it. ■

If I need to tap into embarrassing moments, it's half a second of thinking, and it's right there in vivid detail. That kind of pain does not dull with time.

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